

KING JOHN'S DELEGATION TO THE ALMOHAD COURT (1212)

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KING JOHN'S DELEGATION TO THE ALMOHAD COURT (1212)

Medieval Interreligious Interactions
and Modern Historiography

by

Ilan Shoval



BREPOLS

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Ch. Maj.* *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani: Chronica Majora*, ed. by Henry R. Luard, Rolls Series, 57, 7 vols (London: Longman, 1872–83)
- Rot. Chart* *Rotuli Chartarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. by Thomas Duffus Hardy (London: Record Commission, 1837)
- Rot. de Lib.* *Rotuli de Liberate ac de Misis et Praestitis regnante Johanne*, ed. by Thomas Duffus Hardy (London: Record Commission, 1844)
- Rot. de Ob.* *Rotuli de Oblatis et Finibus in Turri Londinensi Asservati tempore Regis Johannis, 1199–1216*, ed. by Thomas Duffus Hardy (London: Record Commission, 1835)
- Rot. Litt. Claus.* *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. by Thomas Duffus Hardy, 2 vols (London: Record Commission, 1833–44)
- Rot. Litt. Pat.* *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, ed. by Thomas Duffus Hardy (London: Record Commission, 1835)

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MAPS

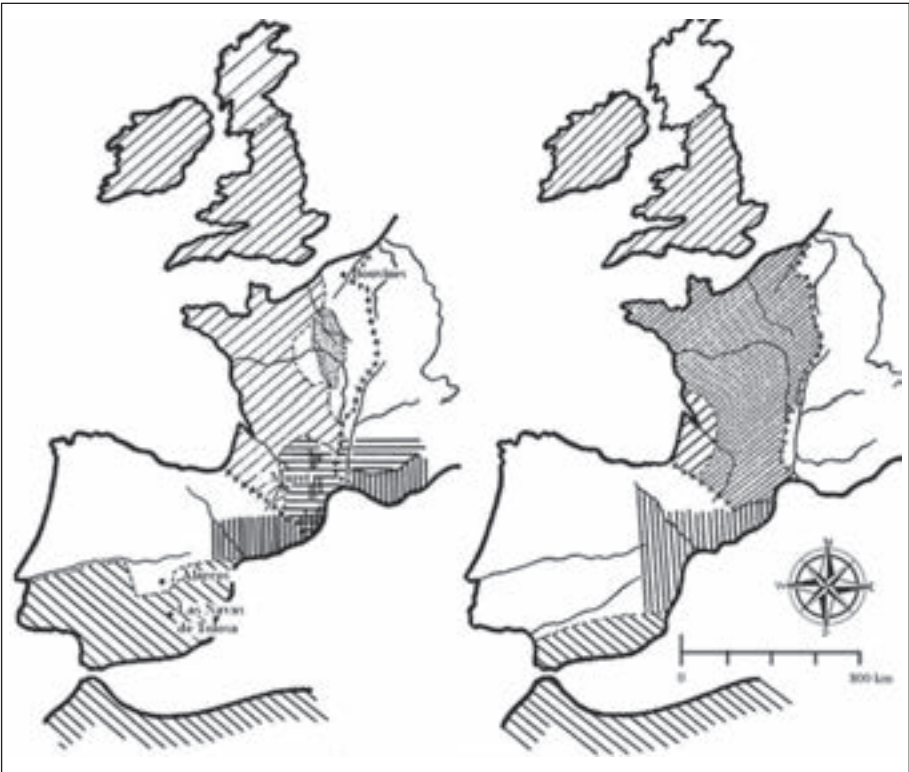


Map 1: The site of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, July 1212.

Map by the author.



Map 2: The Continental Possessions of the Angevins, c. 1200.
After David Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery: Britain, 1066–1284*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).



Map 3: *L'Europe occidentale en 1200 et en 1260*, from Yves Renouard, *Études d'histoire médiévale* (Paris, S.E.V.P.E.N, 1968), p. 90.
(Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holder of this image.)



Map 4: The Angevin and the Almohad Empires, *c.* 1200. Map by the author.

INTRODUCTION

For almost two hundred years, historians have made repeated reference to the small but highly significant episode described in the chronicle of Matthew Paris: a delegation dispatched by King John of England to the Almohad court, ostensibly conveying his proposition to subjugate England to the rule of the caliph (amīr al-mu'minīn/Admiralium Murmelim) and to convert to Islam. The dating, purpose, and historicity of this episode have long been the subjects of intense scholarly disagreement.

My interest in the delegation story was aroused through my studies on interactions between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the frontier regions of the Iberian Peninsula in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and their impact on transformations taking place in these societies. Since discovering, through careful examination of the Latin source of the text, that the story speaks of neither subjugation nor religious conversion, I have come to realize that the historical documentation does not support the prevailing historiographical view.

This research represents an effort towards a full-scale study of Matthew Paris's report on John's delegation to the Almohad court. It will propose a new interpretation of the report, based upon the argument that the documentary evidence in our possession — when read more literally, when approached with the appropriate methodological tools, and when set in the proper historical context — offers a reasonably coherent view of what might have actually occurred between the parties involved.

Primarily engaged with negotiations towards a regional English-Navarrese-Almohad defence alliance, the story also tells of the political pliancy between Christians and Muslims apparently existing even beyond the more historically familiar Iberian frontier and including England as a part of a pulsation of consolidation, disintegration, and recombination of political units on either

side of a conceptual frontier that more often than not may not have existed'.¹ Matthew Paris's report shows how diplomatic and political networks that are typically studied in a Mediterranean context actually extended much further north, all the way to the British Isles.

However, Paris's delegation story is not about cross-cultural diplomacy alone. It contains references to interreligious relations between Christians, Muslims, and Jews — one of John's diplomats may have been a converted Jew — as well as an intriguing 'theological monologue' of the Almohad caliph which features both praise and condemnation of St Paul in regard to his conversion, allowing a glimpse at multiple layers of the Jewish-Christian-Muslim religious polemic tradition.

Supported by a variety of primary Christian, Muslim, and Jewish sources as well as current secondary scholarship, I follow the tradition that considers 'the cultural diversity rather than monolithic nature of both the West and the Muslim worlds and the positive interactions that occurred' in what was described by scholars as, 'a prolonged and fateful intertwining of sibling societies enjoying sovereignty in neighboring geographical regions and following parallel historical trajectories'.² As many researchers currently engaged in interreligious relations in the medieval West agree, neither the Muslim nor the Christian historical path can be fully understood without taking into account one's relation to the other. Within this framework, the West includes western North Africa and acknowledges the Almohads as having set in motion an exceptional and sophisticated political, religious, and intellectual experience that mostly affected the Islamic West but also influenced Latin Christendom, Judaism, and the Islamic East in ways still to be fully explored.³

As I advanced in my study of the delegation story and its broadening historical context, I discovered that while it deals with a seemingly marginal issue in King John's historiography, it has won a great deal of attention from historians. And here is the crux of the matter: in any discussion of John's stewardship — whether pertaining to the English Kingdom and its territories overseas, or in regard to establishing the bureaucracy and the structure of government, or his

¹ Kosto, 'Reconquest, Renaissance and the Histories of Iberia'.

² Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, p. 9. See also Tolan, *Europe and the Islamic World: A History*, pp. 1–7. Daniel G. König refers to Ibn Khaldūn's work 'which looks back on almost eight centuries of a shared history of both the Latin-Christian and Arabic-Islamic world'; see König, 'Arabic-Islamic Perceptions of Western Europe', p. 28.

³ Fromherz, 'North Africa and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', pp. 43–47. See also Fierro, *The Almohad Revolution*, pp. ix–xiv, and Lower, 'The Papacy and Christian Mercenaries'.

scheming in matters of the Crown's relations with the barons, or the Crown's relations with the Church and the papacy — each one of these aspects is clearly reflected within the parameters of the delegation story. Thus, the delegation story essentially epitomizes King John's ventures during his rule over England.

While reading historical studies on John and his reign, I became aware of a major problem in this king's historiography. In biographies and study compilations, as well as in many articles written about John and his rule, historians have described the monarch's enterprises as an odd admixture of victory and defeat. This enigmatic duality with which John has been consistently characterized crosses the diverse periods in which historians wrote, despite a broadening point of view ensuing from the acquisition of hindsight and the continual improvement of historiographical tools.

I soon recognized a parallel between the troubling aspects of John's historiography and the historiography of the delegation story. Just as with the traditional approach to John and his reign (1199–1216), most historians who refer to the story, in spite of the differences among them, first read in the story an offer of subjugation and conversion, and then discuss whether or not the delegation indeed occurred and whether it failed or succeeded in its mission, assessing John as villain or gifted statesman. This parallel prompted my evaluation of the story as a test-case for John's measures during his reign and urged me out of the narrow field of the historiography of the story and into the sphere of the historiography of John's rule and, even more, toward broader and more recent historiographical concerns, such as governance, diplomacy, political networks, and cross-cultural relations in the era of transformation in Western Europe.

Placing Paris's story firmly within the historical context of Christian-Muslim relations may contribute to a historically sounder understanding of King John's ventures. It may reveal as well diverse dimensions in the history of medieval interreligious relations and shed new light on a crucial era of political, diplomatic, and cultural transformation.

A Summary of the Delegation Story

Before we dive into the delegation story itself, a brief review of the story's content is in order. Paris had inserted in his chronicle as an addition to material that he copied from Roger Wendover, his predecessor in St Albans monastery, a report of an event chronologically situated prior to the military encounter between Muslim and Christian forces at Las Navas de Tolosa on Spanish soil in the summer of 1212. According to this chronicle entry, King John sent to the court of the Muslim ruler of North Africa and Spain a diplomatic delega-

tion that included two knights and a monk. Based on the sole authoritative translation of the text from the mid-nineteenth century, most historians read in the text that John offered to transfer the entire kingdom of England to the Almohad caliph and to embrace Islam. Hence, all interpretations of Paris's story have taken as a given the notions of subjugation and conversion.

In the story, the caliph asks Thomas of Erdington, who heads the embassy, several questions, and after considering his responses he declines John's proposition for an alliance. The conventional reading of the text has it that the caliph rejects the proposal because of his contempt for the king's willingness to convert, following St Paul's act of abandoning the religion in which he was born. After speaking with the two knights, the caliph arranges a private audience with the monk-diplomat Robert of London, who is described by Paris as a Jewish figure. The delegation returns to England and reports to John the events of the visit.

Robert of London, Paris adds, was a valued clerk in John's court. He had received from John the role of royal custodian at St Albans monastery. It was Robert of London, according to Paris, who related within Paris's hearing the delegation story to his acquaintances in the monastery.⁴

⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 559–64. On Robert of London as Paris's source, see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 2, 14.

AN ANNOTATED TEXT OF THE DELEGATION STORY AND ITS HISTORIOGRAPHY

Editions and Translations

Matthew Paris began writing the *Chronica majora* in 1235. In approximately 1217 he entered St Albans monastery as a seventeen-year-old novice, apprenticed for a year or two, and then became a monk. The comprehensive chronicle covers the period of the Creation up until the end of Paris's life in the year 1259. Paris copied nearly verbatim into his work the chronicle of Roger of Wendover, who held the position of historian at St Albans prior to him.¹ Paris edited Wendover's chronicle and supplemented it with news of current events — that is, the years 1235 to 1259 — until a short time before his death. It seems that Paris not only knew Wendover but also acquired from him the skill of writing chronicles. Additionally, Paris inherited from him a variety of historiographic positions, later dubbed 'the school of St Albans'.²

Paris added to Wendover's notes regarding the events of the year 1213 the story of the diplomatic embassy.³ It seems that the circumstances in which

¹ *Chronica Rogeri de Wendover*, ed. by Hewlett.

² Galbraith, *Roger Wendover and Matthew Paris*; Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, p. 34; Powicke, 'The Compilation of the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris'. On Matthew Paris's other works, its tradition and its relationship to those of his contemporaries, see Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History'; Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, pp. 363–64; Lloyd and Reader, 'Paris, Matthew (c.1200–1259)'; Carpenter, 'Chronology and Truth', pp. 1–2. On Roger of Wendover, see Corner, 'Wendover, Roger of (d. 1236)'.

³ *Ch. maj.*, II, 559–64. The delegation story also appears in a later version of the chronicle, the *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. by Riley, I, 236–42. See p. 236, n. 1 on

the delegation took place were exceptional, and for this reason Paris recorded them in detail. What was also extraordinary about this addition — and, in fact, unique in the whole chronicle — was an explicit statement made by Paris regarding the source from which he had heard about the delegation. In this, we are privy to the work of a historian, a chronicler of the period, relying on a first-hand account offered by a man claiming to have been one of the three members of the delegation. Paris tells us that he overheard the story as the monk Robert of London related it to his friends in the monastery of St Albans. The story was recounted within Paris's earshot, that is, 'while he was listening'.⁴

The original manuscript of the *Chronica maiora* has come to us in three parts: Manuscript A (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS 26 of Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora* reaches the year 1188); Manuscript B (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS 16 II of Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora* includes the years from 1189 until 1253); and Manuscript R (London, British Museum, MS Royal 14 C vii) begins in 1254 and ends in 1259. The manuscripts of the *Chronica maiora* has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, which began with critical editions published in the nineteenth century by scholars such as Henry R. Luard and Sir Thomas F. Madden, continuing with the research of Sir Maurice Powicke and Vivian Galbraith in the first half of the twentieth century, and culminating in the work of Richard Vaughan, who conducted his research in the early 1950s. Vaughan argues that with the exception of a few sections of text, Manuscript B was written almost exclusively in Paris's hand. To the best of my knowledge, no dispute regarding this matter has been raised, and the handwriting discrepancy in the middle of the sentence covering the events of 1213 in Manuscript B is now universally conceded. Some scholars have claimed that the handwriting is not Paris's but that of his assistant, who copied for him. Historians suggest that a large portion of this manuscript, between the years 1213 and 1253, was written at an even later date, that is, during Paris's last years.⁵ Vaughan, and recently along with David Carpenter, holds that the handwriting discrepancy is the result of the *Chronica maiora* having been written in different periods.⁶ During

variations in the narrative. See also Jenkins, *The Monastic Chronicler and the Early School of St Albans*, p. 77. On its omission from the *Historia Anglorum*, see *Matthaei Parisiensis, Historia Anglorum*, ed. by Madden, p. xi, n. 2.

⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 564; Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 2, 14.

⁵ Powicke, 'The Compilation of the *Chronica Maiora* of Matthew Paris', p. 313.

⁶ *Ch. maj.*, I, pp. ix–xxxii; Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 49–77; Vaughan, 'The Handwriting

this long period, Paris rewrote, added to, and repeatedly annotated the text. The sentence in Manuscript B where the change in the handwriting appears is located at the end of folio 38^r. This specific folio and the pages following it were apparently inserted into a pre-existing file. The delegation story is found on these pages, after the report of the death of the justiciary, Geoffrey fitzPeter. Vaughan demonstrates that in the second half of Manuscript B, beginning from that almost off-hand sentence referring to events of 1213, there exist more than a few areas of textual discontinuity, as Powicke argues when he asserts that the copier was not Paris himself.

The juxtaposition of the handwriting discrepancy and the delegation story actually provides support to the position that Paris indeed wrote it himself. In light of Vaughan's conclusion that Paris supplemented and provided commentary to the manuscript over the course of many years, it seems that while Paris prepared the story, he recorded it on a separate leaf and then inserted it within the pre-existing chronicle. In any event, the issue of handwriting discrepancy taken into consideration, the possibility that it was not Matthew Paris who recorded the delegation story in the *Chronica maiora* has never been raised by scholars. After conducting a thorough re-examination of Manuscript B and after reading the story in the folio in which it appears, I see nothing that requires renewed palaeographical research into the manuscript. I rely on the conclusions of earlier scholars in regard to the text that continues in a different handwriting, starting from the page in which the delegation story is embedded.⁷ I did find it essential to retranslate the text. Overall, my translation accords with that of John A. Giles, but some paragraphs did call for retranslation. The new translation from Latin to English is based on the folio from Manuscript B, and on the printed Latin text which appears in Henry R. Luard's edition published as part of the Rolls Series and based on Manuscripts B and R.⁸

Paris's *Chronica maiora* from 1235 and onwards was translated into English in the mid-nineteenth century by John A. Giles. It was published as a three-volume set entitled *Matthew Paris's English History*. Giles, who relied on the late seventeenth-century edition of William Watts, also published in two vol-

of Matthew Paris'; Carpenter, 'Chronology and Truth', pp. 4–5.

⁷ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS 16 II of Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora*. The manuscript has been repaginated, so the numbering is now slightly different. The passage 'Qualiter rex desperans', where the delegation report starts, begins on fol. 38^r, and, since I include the report on the caliph's defeat in the report, it continues up to fol. 38^v.

⁸ *Ch. maj.*, I, pp. x–xiii. See Appendix to this work at the end of the volume.

umes the materials preceding 1235 as a translation of the chronicle of Roger of Wendover, entitled *Roger Wendover's Flowers of History*. Giles distinguishes between Wendover's original text prior to 1235 and Paris's additions to that same period by font size and an annotation. The English translation of the story appears in the second volume published in 1849.⁹ Our story has yet another translation: in 1924, Edward Denison Ross published a partial translation of it into English. Denison Ross did not specify the Latin source he consulted, but my research disclosed no discrepancies between his and Giles's translations, definitely none that would have led Ross to offer an alternative reading of the text.¹⁰

A Translation of the Text and Paragraph Division

In what manner the desperate king sent to the prince Murnelius:¹¹

1. Therefore he sent most secret emissaries with utmost swiftness, namely, the knights Thomas of Erdington and Ralph, son of Nicholas, and Robert of London, a clerk, to the commander Murnelius, great king of Africa, Morocco, and Spain, whom the common people call Miramumelinus,
2. Telling him that he would wilfully surrender his kingdom, both give up to him and hold what has been surrendered as tributary, if he pleased. And (he will do that) leaving the Christian law which he valued as vain, and would faithfully adhere to the Muhammadan law.
3. When the above-mentioned emissaries, who were to report secretly, arrived at the court of the above-mentioned prince, they came at the first gate upon several armed soldiers guarding the northern entrance with drawn swords. At the second gate, that is, of the palace, they found many soldiers fully armed and diligently guarding the entrance, even more neatly dressed than the prior ones, with drawn swords, apparently braver and nobler than the others. In the entrance of the inner room there were many more, robust and ferocious in appearance. When, however, they were peaceably introduced,

⁹ *Roger Wendover's Flowers of History*, trans. by Giles, II, 283–86. On the quality of the Latin used by Paris in the *Chronica majora*, see Jenkins, *The Monastic Chronicler and the Early School of St Albans*, p. 48. On other editions and translations of the *Chronica*, see Luchitskaya, 'Matthew Paris', p. 403.

¹⁰ Ross, 'An Embassy from King John'.

¹¹ See the Appendix for Henry Luard's Latin text. Division to numbered paragraphs is mine, and its intents and uses will be explained later in this chapter.

by permission of the prince himself, whom they called the Great King, these emissaries greeted reverently on behalf of their lord, that is, the king of England, and disclosed the reason for their arrival, extending to him the royal letter, which an interpreter who was present at a summons fully revealed.

4. With the matter understood, the king, who was a man of middle age and moderate stature, ripe in gesture, eloquent and circumspect in speech, then closed the book he had been inspecting, for he was seated at his desk, studying. At length, after thinking as it were for a time to himself, replied calmly: 'I was just now looking at a book written by a learned Greek and a Christian, named Paul, which is written in Greek, whose acts and words have given me much pleasure, and I accept them; one thing, however, about him displeases me, that is that he did not adhere to the law under which he was born but turned to another, just as a deserter and a waverer. I say this with regard to your lord, king of the English, who is sliding away after abandoning the most pious and pure law of the Christians in which he was born, unsteady as he is.' And he added: 'The omniscient and omnipotent God, creator of all things, knows that had I been bound by no law, I would choose that law before all others, and having accepted it, would have embraced it.'
5. He then inquired after the condition of the king of England and his kingdom, to which Thomas, as the most eloquent among the emissaries, responded: 'He is illustriously and nobly descended from great kings, and his land is opulent and content with its own goods. It is abundant with cultivated land, pastures, meadows, and forests; from that land all kinds of metals are extracted by the process of smelting. Our people, handsome and talented, ingenious and learned in three tongues, that is, in Latin, French, and English, and also fully educated in every liberal and mechanical art. Our country, however, does not produce vineyards, olives, or fir trees but acquires these things by way of commerce from neighbouring countries. The air is salubrious and temperate; it is located between the west and the north, and, receiving heat from the west and cold from the north, it enjoys a most pleasant mild climate. It is surrounded entirely by sea, whence it earned its name Queen of Islands. The kingdom has from olden times, been governed by an anointed and crowned king, our people are distinguished of antiquity of being free and noble, and acknowledge the domination of no one except God. Our church indeed and the practice of our religion prospers more than anywhere else in the world, and it is governed peacefully by the papal and royal laws.'

6. Having heaved a deep sigh, the king responded: 'I have neither read nor heard of any king who possesses such a prosperous, subjugated, and obedient kingdom who would in such manner willingly ruin his sovereignty by making tributary a country that is free, by turning from a fortunate person to a miserable one, and thus surrender himself voluntarily, defeated just as if uninjured, to the will of another. Rather, on the contrary I have often read and heard of many who gained liberty for themselves with much effusion and pouring of their blood, which is laudable, but I just heard of your despicable lord, who is idle and a coward, who is less than a nobody, wishes to turn from a free man into a slave, which is most despicable, indeed most wretched.'
7. Afterwards indeed, but with contempt, he inquired regarding the king's age, stature, and strength. To which the following answer was given, 'that he was fifty, entirely grey-haired, physically strong, not tall but rather well-set and suited for strength'. And when the king heard that he responded: 'His juvenile strength and virile virtue has already begun to grow cold. Within a decade, should he live so long, his strength will fail him before he has achieved any real work; if he should start now, he would break into pieces, and he shall avail for nothing. He is really fifty but seems to be sixty. He had better seek peace for himself and enjoy rest.'
8. The prince then, after weighing all the questions and replies of the emissaries, after a brief interval, having indicated his great indignation by mocking gestures, scorned King John, saying: 'That king is no king but a little king, in senile decay and growing old, nor do I trouble myself about him; he is unworthy of any alliance with me.' And then turning to Thomas and Ralph with fierce countenance, he said: 'Do not return again to my presence, nor shall your eyes further behold my face. The reputation or rather the infamy of your king, who has already apostatized, makes me positively ill.'
9. The envoys then retired shamefully, when the king happened to notice Robert the clerk, who was the third of the envoys and who was small and dark, having one arm longer than the other and misshapen fingers, that is, two of them being joined together, and with a face of a Jew. The king then considered carefully that such a despicable person would not be deputed to conduct such a difficult mission, unless he was possessed of knowledge and understanding, and observing his crown and tonsure realized that he was a clerk and ordered him to be summoned to his presence; for while the others were speaking, he had until now remained silent and at a distance. He thus retained him while the others were sent away and spoke with him

in secret of many things, which Robert later revealed to his friends. The king asked him whether King John of England had any abilities, whether he had vigorous sons, and whether he possessed great generative power. And he added that if Robert deviated from the truth in his replies, he would never again believe a Christian, especially a cleric. Then Robert, taking an oath by his Christian law, undertook to answer everything truthfully. He told the king assertively that he was a tyrant rather than a king, a subverter rather than a ruler, an oppressor of his own people and supporter of others, a lion to his own subjects, a lamb to foreigners and rebels, who due to his greed lost the duchy of Normandy and many other of his lands and further was eager to lose or destroy the kingdom of England; that he was an insatiable extortionist, usurper, and destroyer of the possessions of his own natural subjects; he had begotten few strong children, or rather none at all, but only such following their father; he had a wife who was hostile to him and who hated him, an incestuous, evil, and adulterous woman, and of these misdeeds she had been often found guilty, on which the king ordered her lovers to be seized and strangled with a rope on her bed. Nonetheless, this same king was envious of many of his nobles and relations, and violently corrupted their marriageable daughters and sisters. With respect to the Christian law, he was wavering and distrustful, as you have heard. When the king heard these things, he not only scorned John but detested him, and according to his own law cursed him and said, 'Why do the miserable English allow such a person to reign, and rule over them? Surely they are effeminate and servile.' Robert replied: 'The English are the most patient of men until they are offended and injured beyond measure. Now however, like a lion or an elephant, when he feels himself injured or when bloodthirsty, they are enraged, and are striving and endeavouring, although late, to remove the yoke of the oppressor from their necks.' When the king heard this, he criticized the excessive patience of the English, which the interpreter, who had been present throughout, declared properly to be fear.

The king discussed with Robert many issues besides this, which he afterwards revealed to his friends in England. After he conferred upon Robert precious presents of gold and silver, various kinds of jewels and silks, he dismissed him in peace. The other departing envoys however, he neither wished well on their departure nor provided with presents. He sent neither greetings nor gifts to John, the king of England.

10. When they returned to their country and informed their lord what they had seen and heard, King John grieved vehemently with bitterness of spirit, for being in that manner scorned by the king and at being obstructed in his plan.

Robert, however, gave the king freely from the foreign presents he had been given, so that he was immediately received more favourably than the others, although at first he had been repulsed and kept silent. Whence the king honoured him more than the others, and as a reward, this wicked extortionist granted him the charge of the abbacy of St Albans, although it was not vacant, so that this transgressor of the faith remunerated his own clerk with the property of another.

11. This Robert then, without consulting, and even more, against the will of the temporary abbot John de Cella, a most religious and most learned man, seized at pleasure everything which was then in the church and the convent, and appropriated it to himself. And in each bailiwick, which we call obedientiary, he appointed the largest number of porters as a careful and resolute searcher of everything; by which means the aforesaid clerk, Robert, cheated that house of more than a thousand marks.

He, however, had enjoyed the company and had as his familiars some of the chief servants of the abbot and the monks of St Albans, namely, Laurence, knight of the seneschal, Laurence a clerk, and Master Walter, the monk and painter, to whom he showed his jewels and other secret things which were bestowed on him by the aforementioned king, and related all that had been said, in the earshot of Matthew, who has written and related these events.

12. Commander Murmelinus flees defeated

At the same time, Commander Murmelinus, of whom mention was made above, with the formidable force that he had assembled, not without, as said, King John's consent, had arranged to forcibly occupy the borders of Spain, to which great audacity he was brought by the above-mentioned wavering faith of King John and the interdict on that kingdom. When, however, the Christian kings of Spain heard and after some prelates joined them, they bravely opposed him, and the caliph's defeated army fled from his frontiers, after [the Christians] killed his eldest son and captured the royal standard.

Why Did Paris Choose to Incorporate the Delegation Story into the Chronica majora?

In paragraph 12, which is an independent entry and is located slightly later in the *Chronica majora*, there is also a reference to events of the year 1213. Paris explicitly states (twice in the text itself) that the delegation story should be read only in the context of a military encounter, that is, the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa: 'At the same time, Commander Murmelinus, *of whom mention was made above* with the formidable force which he had assembled, not without, *as said* King John's consent, had arranged to forcibly occupy the borders of Spain.'¹²

Paris, while dating the delegation story to the exact moment just before or at the time that the caliph, at the head of his army, moved into Spain for the planned confrontation with Castile, reveals with familiarity the details of the battle and addresses, albeit inaccurately, John's strategic and political motives. Thus, the reader seems to have no choice but to interpret the delegation story in light of this paragraph. No hint of historical context can be found in the story itself. We are told neither the date on which the delegation took place nor the reasoning behind John's offer to the caliph. Although the subtitle states explicitly that John was motivated by a sense of desperation, nothing in the text sheds light on the nature of this desperation. However, in that separated paragraph, Paris gives us the historical context of the scene: the time, place, and motives for the events. With this information, Paris burdens historians with a heavy load: specifically, his clarification shatters the notion that John sought to subjugate England and to convert to Islam. Such a conclusion makes no sense in light of the information that the caliph only began his journey to conquer the borders of Spain after he received John's consent, and that this agreement was already recounted in the delegation story.

From the intersection of the sources that are now available to us, that is, both Christian and Muslim sources, and from the latest research, there emerges a fairly complete picture of what happened in the course of events described by Paris: the move of the Almohads as they began crossing the Strait of Gibraltar in May 1211, and of its ending in their defeat in the battle of Las Navas in July 1212. This information includes the close relations between the Almohad caliphs al-Manṣūr (r. 1184–99) and al-Nāṣir (r. 1199–1213) and Sancho VII of

¹² *Ch. maj.*, II, 566 (italics mine). On the chronological sequence of the chapters and Paris's breaking of events into a series of non-consecutive chapters, see Carpenter, 'Chronology and Truth', p. 3.

Navarre (r. 1194–1234); those between the Angevins, particularly King John (r. 1199–1216) and Sancho; and Sancho's part in the battle of Las Navas.

However, the information about the aforementioned does not resolve the difficulties in the delegation story and, in particular, those that appear in paragraph 12. It begs the question: what information was known to Paris such that he could incorporate into his manuscript, whether gossip or actual events, what he heard regarding the co-operation between John and the caliph of Morocco, which enabled him to weave the delegation story?

Paris relies on Wendover's work the *Flores Historiarum* until 1235, the year Wendover stopped writing. Wendover for his part does not mention in his entries on 1213, or before that, anything about the encounter in Las Navas. He makes no reference to the Almohads' invasion of Spain, neither to the battle itself nor to its results. There is also no reference to John in that context, or in the context of a relationship with the Iberian kingdoms, Christian or Muslim;¹³ however, Paris could have learned about the invasion of the Almohads into Spain from the *Annals of Barnwell*. This important contemporary source, which later received the title the *Barnwell Chronicle*, contains information regarding the years 1201–25 and was copied in the late thirteenth century in its entirety into another chronicle, that of Walter of Coventry. This work has come down to us under the title *Memoriale fratris Walteri de Coventria*. The *Barnwell Chronicle* recounts that during 1211 the Moors, led by the amir al-Mu'minīn, invaded Spain with the intent to advance into France. It also informs us that a year later they were defeated, banished from Spain, and ceased to be a threat to the Christians.¹⁴ Paris may have concluded from this chronicle that the inten-

¹³ Roger of Wendover does not give any information regarding events that occurred in the Iberian Peninsula after the battle of Alarcos in 1195. See *Roger Wendover's Flowers of History*, trans. by Giles, II, 140–41.

¹⁴ *Memoriale Fratris Walteri de Coventria*, ed. by Stubbs, II, 204: AD 1211: 'Venientes ex Affrica pagani Amiramummoli duce, et hiis qui in Hyspania erant associati, Christianis illarum partium principibus terrori erant; et illatis frequentibus irruptionibus et congressionibus manifestis, terras et civitates nonnullas eorum occupaverunt' (The pagans approaching from Africa under the leadership of the caliph were a cause of terror also for those who were allies in Spain to the Christians leaders in these parts, and when frequent incursions and attacks were inferred, they occupied some of their lands and cities). AD 1212: 'Conatus Amiramummoli, qui in superbia multa et multitudine gravi, quasi omnem sibi subjecturus Christianitatem, in Hispanias ascenderat, nutu Divino adnihilatus est. Contrito enim a Christianis principibus ejus exercitu, confusione indutus et reverentia, ab ausu cessavit temerario' (Amiramummoli endeavoured, he who with much pride and great multitude, as if about to subject all Christendom to himself, ascended the Spanish, by divine will was annihilated. His army was destroyed by the

tion of the Muslims was to reach the borders of Spain and perhaps far beyond it to the north of the Pyrenees, and that this march constituted a threat to all of Western Europe.¹⁵

Paris himself wrote in reference to the objectives of the caliph that these included 'the borders of Spain'. And from here, as I try to show below, the text reveals, against the intentions of Paris when he referred to the 'Kingdom of England', the complete geopolitical reality of the moment. According to this picture, only the English fiefs on the mainland, Gascony and Aquitaine, located indeed on the borders of Spain, might have been discussed in any possible contact between John and the Almohads. These are the only territories of strategic value to the Muslims that John could have raised in any proposal he could have made to the caliph. In May of 1212, while John was preparing for an attack against France and its allies and while the Almohad caliph Muḥammad al-Nāṣir was preparing an offensive against Castile and its allies, the two rulers had common interests. Through Gascony, the caliph could flank Castile from the north. Additionally, John's lands, Gascony and Aquitaine, could have functioned as a strategic asset to the caliph had he indeed planned on continuing his journey north past the Pyrenees. As I suggest later, although there is no explicit evidence of such a plan in the Muslim sources, the Muslims might have been well aware of their power and deterrent influence among the Europeans.¹⁶ At the same time, al-Nāṣir was to ensure the integrity of the duchies and John's rule over them, from the likes of France, Castile, or any other claimants.

The *Barnwell Chronicle* makes reference to, but does not discuss in detail, the results of the battle at Las Navas. It is tempting, then, to suggest that Paris had in his hands yet another source. I refer to the letter 'published all over England' by Arnaud Amaury (d. 1225), the archbishop of Narbonne, which was (or had

Christian princes, he was put into disorder and fear, he ceased from his imprudent audacity). David Carpenter contends that the original text of the *Barnwell Chronicle* was written by a monk at Crowland Abbey in southern Lincolnshire and hence deserves the title 'the Crowland chronicle'. It seems that Paris relied on some version of the chronicle. He repeated, for example, the observation that John 'favoured foreigners and oppressed his native subjects, being deserted by them at the last'; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 86–87.

¹⁵ Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII of Navarre with the Almohads', pp. 14–15, especially note 10.

¹⁶ Ibn 'Iḍārī al-Marrākushī, *Al-Bayān Al-Mugrib fī ijtisār ajbār mulūk al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib*, ed. by Huici Miranda, pp. 271–72. On similar expressions of fear among the Christians, see the chronicle *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* in Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, pp. 233–35.

already been) inserted into the chronicle *Annals of Waverley*. This work, which describes contemporary events of the period, anticipated the invasion of the Moors into Spain in 1210, but within the section for 1212 there appears a long detailed letter written by the archbishop of Narbonne regarding the battle of Las Navas, which he placed on 17 August of that same year.¹⁷ Paris's description of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa is very similar to that of the archbishop. The latter calls the battle by its name, states exactly where it occurred, and writes that 'it was announced throughout the kingdom of England that the caliph "Miramumelinus", the King of Morocco, was defeated by the Christians and fled'.¹⁸ What emerges from paragraph 12 is that Paris not only knew of the defeat of the Muslims during that decisive battle which took place between them and Christian coalition on the Iberian frontier, but that he also had in his grasp information regarding what occurred during the battle. Remarkably, Paris mentions the part taken by the church leaders who headed the Crusader forces beyond the Pyrenees, and it is likely that his words are aimed directly at the archbishop of Narbonne: 'When, however, the Christian kings of Spain heard and after some *prelates* joined them, they bravely opposed him, and the caliph's defeated army fled from his frontiers.'¹⁹

If the *Annals of Waverley* were indeed before Paris's eyes, it is very likely that he found in Archbishop Amaury's letter confirmation for what he read in the

¹⁷ *Anales Monasterii de Waverleia*, ed. by Luard, II, xxxvi. On Paris's sources, see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 11–20.

¹⁸ *Anales Monasterii de Waverleia*, ed. by Luard, 271–73: 'Divulgatum est per Angliam quod Miramumelinus rex Marrochenensis cum magna multitudine, et fortitudine, et (qui, sicut audivimus a plerisque, bellum indixerat omnibus illis qui crucem adorant,) ab illis eisdem qui crucem colunt bello campestri devictus est, et fugatus...Fuit autem istud bellum anno Dominicæ Incarnationis MCCXII, xvii kal. Augusti, feria secunda, ante festum [Sanctæ] Magdalene, in loco qui dicitur Navas de Tholosa; erat quippe quoddam castrum Maurorum prope, quod Tholosa nuncupatur, quod nunc per gratiam Dei redactum est in potestatem Christianorum' (It was published all over England that Miramumelinus, king of Morocco, with great multitude and strength and [who, as we have heard from many declared war on all those who revere the Cross] by those same who worship the Cross has been defeated in open field battle, and was put to flight [...]. That battle took place in the year of the Lord 1212, 17 Kal. of August, at the second holyday, before the feast of St Magdalene in the place named Navas de Tholosa; this was near the camp of the moors named Tholosa which now by the grace of God was brought back under Christian sovereignty). See MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*, p. 34. On the archbishop of Narbonne's visit to the court of King Sancho VII in May 1212, see Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, p. 230.

¹⁹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 566: 'Quod cum cognoverunt reges Hispaniæ Christiani, additis quibusdam praelatis, viriliter restiterunt.' Italics in the above translation are mine.

Chronicle of Barnwell regarding the vast dimensions of the Muslim threat to Western Europe. Paris presumably understood the complexity of the political situation and its dangers, and therefore chose to record the information he had about a delegation sent by John to the Muslims precisely in the context of that situation. He sought to emphasize that John not only refrained from helping the Christians confront the Muslims at Las Navas, but rather that he asked to assist them. Should they further extend their attacks beyond the Pyrenees, John gave his consent to the caliph to make strategic use of his territory, while promising its integrity under his rule.

When Paris wrote about the events of 1213, he still referred to John as he was traditionally perceived, as an enemy of the Church, the pope, and the Christian faith. However, with lifting of the interdict that same year, and the king reconciling with the pope and becoming civil sovereign, under the grace of the Holy See, of the Church of England, the hostility of the chronicler monk abated. And here, in an additional thought, Paris recalled the *Chronicle of Barnwell*, as well as possibly the letter of the archbishop of Narbonne, in which the cleric implicitly accused John of not sending his army to assist the Christians against the Muslims in what evolved into one of the larger battles between the factions, and which could have ended in a disastrous outcome for Western Europe. Then Paris recalled the stories told in the abbey by Robert of London, the bits of gossip and slander regarding John and his co-operation with the Muslim caliph, that he overheard when Robert related these stories to his friends at the monastery.²⁰

But how did Paris learn about what happened on the Iberian Peninsula in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century? What did he know about the relationship between the Christian kingdoms and the Muslims, and about the relationship between the kingdom of England and the Iberian kingdoms? Further, how did this information intersect with what he had heard from Robert of London regarding the relationship John had with the Muslims?

It turns out that Paris knew some details of the relationship of the Christian kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula with the Muslims, as well as about the contacts between the Angevins and the Iberian Christian kingdoms during 1190s. Most of the information about these issues, perhaps even all of it, came to

²⁰ Frederick M. Powicke refers to the additions and alterations Paris had inserted until his last days, into the manuscript of the *Cronica majora*. See Powicke, 'The Compilation of the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris', p. 317: 'We can see an old man, conscious that his work is nearly done and weary of original composition [...]. Just as, while he was composing his history of the English, some memory or some odd note continually brought things into his mind.'

Paris from the chronicle of Roger of Howden, who wrote until 1201. Howden himself died in 1201, and his chronicle was edited by others from materials he left behind. In 1213, Howden's editors completed their work. Historians have already noted that the introduction into Howden's chronicle of information about Sancho VII of Navarre and the Almohads might have been related to an interest in rehabilitating the image of the king after his heroic joining of the Christian camp in the battle of Las Navas. Such information was at the editors' disposal a decade after Howden died.²¹ However, whoever edited Howden's materials did not directly address the events that occurred up until 1201, nor did they explicitly connect them to the event that took place thirteen years later. And Paris, who read Howden's chronicle as it was in front of him during the 1230s or 1240s, could not have known, not from that — and, as it turns out, not from any other source, including the letter of the archbishop of Narbonne — of Sancho's dramatic about-face on the eve of the battle of Las Navas (an issue I shall discuss in detail in Chapter 3). Paris's informational channel about events on the Iberian Peninsula and of the matters of the English in the region was thus cut off with the end of Howden's chronicle. At Howden's disposal was first-hand information, since he himself accompanied the English Crusaders while they passed through Lisbon en route to the Holy Land, and he had collected ample information from the English who fought alongside the Iberian kings against the Muslims. Paris learned from Howden's chronicle, for instance, that English knights from London assisted Sancho I, king of Portugal, in a campaign conducted in 1190 against the king of Morocco, Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, whom Howden dubs 'Boyac'.²² Furthermore, there is no doubt that Paris knew that in 1191 Berengaria, sister of Sancho of Navarre, became queen of England by her marriage to King Richard in Cyprus.²³ Among the events of 1194, Paris notes in his *Chronica majora* the assistance Richard received from Sancho, whom in the same year was crowned king of Navarre, in his war with the county of Angoulême.²⁴ Paris relies on Howden's chronicle, as well as that of Ralph of Coggeshall, when he describes the 1195 invasion of the Muslims into Spain and the great destruction sowed in the Christian kingdoms. Paris offers no details beyond what he learned from Howden about that encounter

²¹ Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII of Navarre with the Almohads', p. 21.

²² *Ch. maj.*, II, 365–66.

²³ *Ch. maj.*, II, 364, 371–72.

²⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 406.

in which the Almohads, led by the caliph al-Nāṣir, defeated Alfonso VIII in the battle of Alarcos/al-ʿArak.²⁵

It was from Howden that Paris learned about the Iberian connection to the pact that was signed between John and Philip Augustus in Le Goulet in 1200.²⁶ Howden's chronicle was in fact the only source available to Paris from which he was able to extract concrete historical information regarding an agreement between a Christian Iberian kingdom and the amīr al-Mu'minīn, a Muslim ruler who fought in Las Navas and about whose ties with John Paris had partial memories derived from Robert of London. In his chronicle, Roger of Howden writes extensively about the relationship, including the political alliance between the caliph al-Nāṣir and Sancho. Paris would have noted in Howden's writings on the events of 1201 a reference to Sancho's return to his kingdom from Africa. With this information, the idea of the relations between the Christian king of Navarre and the Muslims may have become fixed in his mind.²⁷ Howden specifically addresses the matter of 'fief transfers' and writes that the caliph offered Sancho in exchange for marrying his daughter 'all the land that is called Muslim Spain'.²⁸ Howden also identifies the military co-operation between the Muslims and the Christians when he writes that the Muslim ruler was expected to send a military force to assist Sancho of Navarre.²⁹ It seems that Paris used this information as the model for the contract that John proposed to the Almohads as described in the delegation story. He may well have recorded what he remembered of the stories of Robert of London regarding the agreement between John and the caliph, in the framework of a political-military agreement that actually had occurred in 1199 between the caliph and Sancho of Navarre. Was there a source from which Paris was able to learn about the relations between John and Sancho of Navarre? Paris does not mention the agreements between the two from 1201 and 1202, which are found in the royal records, nor is the agreement of 1201 mentioned by Howden. Had Paris known about these agreements, he likely would have mentioned them in his chronicle, in light of their association with the Almohad caliph, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. Further information regarding the relationship between John and the brother of the widowed queen of England would have helped

²⁵ *Ch. maj.*, II, 410.

²⁶ *Ch. maj.*, II, 461.

²⁷ *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houdene*, ed. by Stubbs, IV, 113.

²⁸ *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houdene*, ed. by Stubbs, III, 91.

²⁹ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, pp. 223–24.

Paris make sense of the relationship between John and Sancho and the latter's role, perhaps as an intermediary in the diplomatic negotiations between John and the Almohads.³⁰

The Annotated Text

Paris's positioning of the story creates internal textual tension that places its credibility severely into question. A deconstruction of the story makes its difficulties very clear. For this purpose, I divided the text into paragraphs, through which the reader may view the entire literary structure. The narrative disruptions and the absence of internal logic will be quite noticeable. Here I have two goals: first, the deconstruction allows us to follow Paris's train of thought regarding the chain of events; and second, it allows the story, or even forces the story, to recount the events 'as they actually happened'.

And so we begin. In the first paragraph, Paris lists the members of the delegation. In the second paragraph, he relates John's proposal as delivered to the caliph, through the emissaries. Nowhere else in the text are the specifics of the proposal supplied. From paragraphs 3 through 10, the story is told by a narrator who acts as a third-party witness to the events. From paragraph 3 and until paragraph 9, the delegation is found in the court of the caliph, and in paragraph 10 the delegation is found back in England in the court of King John.

Paragraph 11 represents a narrative turnaround. In the blink of an eye, John and all his injustices disappear. Centre stage is taken by Robert of London, a member of the delegation, who appears in paragraphs 9 and 10, where in only a few lines Paris manages to attribute to him, multiplied and amplified, all the wrongs previously attributed to John.

And yet, the real surprise, the great literary reversal, is reserved for the last line in paragraph 11. Here, the delegation story essentially reverses itself. For what Paris says is that at some point, he heard these events from Robert of London as he (Robert) told it to his friends some time later — it seems perhaps over a decade later, as I suggest below — and he sifted the memories so as to record the story of the delegation in the folio into which he put into the *Chronica majora*. This removes from Paris responsibility for the narrative and leaves Robert of London a true villain: fraud, opportunist, callous shyster. In fact, already within the story, Paris hints at the possibility of Robert being a

³⁰ Paris knew of the aid brought by Sancho of Navarre to Richard in 1194; see *Ch. maj.*, II, 406; Reader, 'Sweet Charity and Sour Grapes'; Carpenter, 'Chronology and Truth'.

converted Jew, and throughout the story and even more so in paragraph 11, he attributes to him stereotypical characteristics of the Jews as seen through the eyes of a thirteenth-century clergymen. However, in the concluding paragraph, Paris reverts to the role of the responsible historian and places the story in its historically correct period and place.

Under each subtitle in the literary-historical analysis below, I refer to full paragraphs or to fragments of various paragraphs as the textual raw material. I begin by presenting the tensions or contradictions found in the fragments. Next, I present reasons for the contradictions and offer solutions. The literary-historical analysis will enable us to see how Paris interwove the story such that it all worked out in his mind. At the same time, the other ways to read the text will be revealed: the one that runs counter to the established view held by historians, and the other in favour of the delegation being a feasible, historical event. In order to resolve the textual problems, it will be helpful to first distinguish between the different types of material found within the text. For example, Paris sometimes uses historical material that are not bits of gossip and memories but, rather, structured legal formulations. There is also a kind of descriptive story, where Paris reveals himself to be a raconteur of the first rank. Such material might include memories of things said by Robert, who was the main source of his information, or general information that Paris had available to him. And there is also a sort of quote from Robert, which, while presented as if told by Robert, was most probably not precisely what was actually stated. Finally, there are things that Robert told his acquaintances that were revised in accordance with his own interests when he recounted them. I will take a close look at the breaks in the text, and even at the contradictions between what is written in the text and what historians have read into the text, from the days of the Victorians up until our time. Careful attention to what Paris wrote in the delegation story leaves us with the sense that he was a consistent, albeit not necessarily truthful, chronicler of events.³¹

The Dating

The first difficulty in the text pertains to the dating. What was Paris thinking when he decided to insert the folio with the delegation story into the *Chronica majora* in 1213? When did the delegation take place, both according to the text and such that it would be seen by Paris as consistent with other events he

³¹ White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact'.

mentioned? The text which I am discussing are from within paragraphs 10 to 12 and from paragraph 3.³²

There is a discrepancy between three dates in Paris's story. The first is the date that emerges from paragraph 12, in which the chronicler places the delegation right before the battle of Las Navas in the summer of 1212. The second is the date derived from paragraph 10, where he connects the appointment of Robert of London as custodian of St Albans on behalf of the king, subsequent to and as a reward for his participation as the king's official in the delegation. The third is the time that the interdict had been imposed upon the kingdom whence Robert's appointment was marked. On the one hand, Paris links the delegation with the action that began with the invasion of the caliph into Spain during 1211, or according to what the chronicler may have learned from the *Annals of Waverley*, as early as 1210, and which ended in the battle of Las Navas. The letter of the archbishop of Narbonne might have clued him in to its occurrence in the summer of 1212. In other words, Paris positioned the delegation somewhere between 1210/1211–12. On the other hand, the chronicler writes that Robert arrived at St Albans, appointed by John as a reward for his services in the delegation, that is to say, only after the delegation returned to England from its mission to the Almohads; however, according to the royal records, Robert was appointed by John to St Albans at the end of March 1208, exactly four days after the papal interdict was imposed, a fact which must have been well known to Paris through the documents available in the monastery.³³ When Robert's appointment as custodian in St Albans was linked to his service in the delegation, it places him too early to be in any way associated with the caliph's activities in the battle of Las Navas.

What did historians do with these inaccuracies? The Victorians, who considered Paris a reliable historian, and most certainly the contemporary ones, who see him as a master storyteller, have no way of coming to terms with this paradox. How is it then possible to resolve the difficulties of the dating issue? Above, I noted my view as to what motivated Paris to record this story where he did, in 1213; however, contrary to Paris's intention, a careful critical reading of the text reveals that he reluctantly placed the story in precisely the correct historical context: during the time that the caliph crossed the lands of Spain

³² See my translation and *Ch. maj.*, II, 560, 564–66. The work of copying the drafts he prepared into the *Chronica* might have been the cause of Paris's mistakenly dating the event of the delegation in 1213. See Carpenter, 'Chronology and Truth: Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora*', p. 5.

³³ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 81b.

with the intention of pushing Castile and its allies from its borders and deepening his penetration north. Despite the background problem mentioned above, the dating of the delegation story is likely consistent from Paris's point of view. Herein lies in the heart of the issue: a description of the palace (paragraph 3), that on one hand can be reasonably surmised to be a palace in Morocco, and on the other hand, the line in paragraph 12 that reads, or can reasonably be read as saying, that John's consent was given prior to the invasion.³⁴ In the two opening sentences in the third paragraph, we read: 'When the mentioned emissaries who were to report secretly, arrived at the courtyard of the above-named prince.' In the three opening sentences of paragraph 12, we find: 'At the same time, that commander Murmelinus, of whom mention was made above, with a formidable force that he had assembled, not without, as said, King John's consent, had arranged to forcibly occupy the borders of Spain.'

The description of the palace in paragraph 3 is an extremely detailed account of the court of the Almohad caliph, and this can be confirmed, at least with what pertains to the security arrangements, from other sources.³⁵ The first is Ibn abī-Zar's *al-Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* (*The Entertaining Companion Book in the Garden of Pages from the Chronicle of the Kings of Morocco and the History of the City of Fes*) in which the fourteenth-century Muslim chronicler describes precisely how the Almohad caliph displayed his military forces in order to impress his Christian visitors, and how carefully he arranged the setting in which he received them.³⁶ The second source is from the testimony of a Jewish diplomat, Abraham al-Fakhār, who visited the court of al-Nāṣir's heir with a delegation sent by Alfonso VIII of Castile. As was notably common in Almohad courts, the caliph was kept almost inaccessible, such that one would have to pass through various sections of the palace and numerous guards before being granted audience.³⁷ Only few historians address the references in paragraph 12 'as stated above' and 'with John's consent'. That occurred as part of an attempt to date

³⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 566: 'Per idem quoque tempus, ipse rex sive admiralius Murmelinus, *de quo supradictum est*, cum infinito quem conflaverat exercitu, non sine *ut dicitur*, regis Johannis assensu, fines Hispaniae potenter disposuit occupare' (italics mine). On the description of the caliph's palace, see Fuess and Härtung, *Court Cultures in the Muslim World*.

³⁵ *Ch. maj.*, II, 560.

³⁶ Ibn Abī Zar', *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, ed. by Huici Miranda, II, 457–60. See Barbour, 'The Embassy Sent by King John', p. 381, and 'Two Christian Embassies', pp. 198–99.

³⁷ Decter, 'Before Caliphs and Kings', pp. 16–17. Decter cites the Jewish diplomat of Alfonso VIII to the court of the Almohad ruler al-Mustanṣir, who reported as follows: 'They brought me into the garden of the Caliph al-Mustanṣir, which I found to be of the utmost beauty as though it were Paradise. By its gate I saw a guard of the utmost hideousness [...].'

the delegation story according to the text, although it did not appear to make a difference in the reading of John's offer to the caliph to subjugate the whole kingdom and convert to Islam. Edward Denison Ross states that the delegation should be dated — if indeed the story was at all true — either before 1211 or after January 1213, in accordance with the respective dates that al-Nāṣir spent outside of Morocco. Denison Ross assumes that the delegation did indeed meet the caliph in his palace in Marrākesh and adds that since the caliph was out of the city between the spring of 1211 and January 1213, it is hardly reasonable that the delegation occurred anytime between these dates. Denison Ross relies on the paragraph in Paris's chronicle, according to which al-Nāṣir invaded Spain upon John's consent, and hence he concludes that the delegation visited the caliph before 1211, that is, before he even crossed the strait.³⁸ To this should be added my contention, presented above, regarding Paris's information about the battle of Las Navas.

It turns out that Paris concludes that the delegation to Morocco took place during or before the preparations for the caliph's plot to invade Spain. This conclusion enables him to date it to as early as 1208 or 1209, in Morocco, and this placement makes the story consistent from the narrator's perspective. Evidence of this was already brought by John Lingard, who points to another of Paris's works, the *Gesta abbatum*, which presents the delegation story immediately after the report about the appointment of Robert of London by the king as custodian of St Alban's monastery.³⁹

However, the text pointedly states that the delegation, in as much as it was recorded by Paris in the wider context of the battle of Las Navas, could only have occurred in the period immediately prior to that battle. Only after the Almohads had succeeded in moving their forces to the front line, and when that same front had been directly connected to the interests of the parties involved, did the two sides coincide. Thus, Howden's story about the relationship between the Christian king of Navarre and the Muslim caliph stands in sharp relief to Paris's ignorance of the events that took place on the Iberian Peninsula with respect to Navarre's relations with the Almohads or John's rela-

³⁸ Ross, 'An Embassy from King John', pp. 558–59.

³⁹ Lingard, *A History of England*, writes that 'the story rests on the best authority, that of Paris, a monk of the same monastery, who heard Robert relate it to his companions' (III, 28). Lingard ventures to remove it from the place which it occupies in Paris's history and to insert it in 1209 for two reasons: first, because it occurred during the interdict, as Paris wrote elsewhere (*Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. by Riley, I, 235–36); second, because it happened before the great battle of Muradel in 1212, which broke the power of the caliph.

tions with Sancho. From this story a seed was planted in Paris's mind, connecting the memories of the story he had heard from Robert of London with the relations between Navarre and Morocco. In Chapter 3, I expand upon the historical background of the relations between Navarre and the Almohads, and those among England, Navarre, and the Almohads, on the eve of the conflict in Las Navas.

Why Was John 'Desperate'?

While the title of the entry states that John was pushed to send a delegation because of his desperation, there is nothing in the text until paragraph 11 that sheds light on the circumstances of that desperation. On the contrary, John's relations with the barons, the English Church, and the papacy seem to be harmonious. The texts that I will discuss are those that relate to the title 'In What Manner the Desperate King Sent to the Prince Murnelius',⁴⁰ as well as a fragment of paragraph 12: 'to which great audacity he was brought by the above-mentioned wavering faith of King John and the interdict on that kingdom.'⁴¹

Historians who treat the delegation story tend to steer clear of paragraph 12. And even those historians, the Victorians in particular, who saw the problems in the text as strengthening its credibility, continued to read it as an offer of John to subjugate England and to convert to Islam. However, this very paragraph contains the solution. Here, Paris provides complete historical contextualization. He explains that the desperation to which the title makes reference was John's experience of the interdict imposed upon him by the pope in 1208, which was lifted only after their reconciliation in 1213, the year in which Paris inserted the delegation story into the *Chronica majora*. From Paris's point of view, the story remains consistent. Furthermore, Paris expends remarkable effort to mark the interdict as the cause for John's desperation at the beginning as well as at the end of his report on the delegation, despite the utterly contradictory way he had described John and his relations with the church and the papacy through the head of the delegation, Thomas of Erdington, in the course of that report. Thus, the chronicler's explanation for John's desperation contradicts the conventional reading of the text pertaining to John's dire outlook with respect to the barons, as well as the issues of political subjugation and conver-

⁴⁰ *Ch. maj.*, II, 559.

⁴¹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 566.

sion.⁴² In later chapters we will learn more about the historical circumstances of John's decision to accept the papal conditions and put an end to the dispute.

John's Offer to the Caliph

Again and again, John's purported two-point offer has formed the fulcrum upon which a wide range of interests has been leveraged. As we now know, however, such a reading is encumbered with severe problems of historical interpretations. Thus, we have quite an urgent question: Does paragraph 2 in fact refer to political subjugation and religious conversion?

The texts that I will review below, toward the goal of answering that question, are fragments from paragraph 2, and due to their importance I quote the paragraph here in full: 'Telling him that he would wilfully surrender his kingdom, both give up to him and hold what has been surrendered as tributary, if he pleased. And (he will do that) leaving the Christian law which he valued as vain, and would faithfully adhere to the Muhammadan law.'⁴³ An accompanying fragment that is also important is from paragraph 3: 'When, however, they were peaceably introduced, by permission of the prince himself, whom they called the Great King, these emissaries greeted reverently on behalf of their lord, that is, the king of England, and disclosed the reason for their arrival, extending to him the royal letter, which an interpreter who was present at a summons fully revealed.'⁴⁴ What appears in paragraph 2, as well as in an additional two lines from paragraph 3, constitutes the entirety of Paris's narration regarding John's offer. These lines, which have sown so much confusion for so long, deserve sustained and comprehensive attention.

Thus, we will now embark upon a thorough linguistic examination of the text presented in paragraph 2. A careful rereading of the original Latin reveals a new take on the matter: John's offer as it is presented in the text in no way entails the subjugation of England or a religious conversion. Paris writes that

⁴² Allen Fromherz accepts Michael Brett's reference in Roger of Wendover's chronicle to the story, and asserts that 'the King of England offered to convert to Islam and become a vassal if the Caliph offered help against the rebellion of the Magna Carta nobles'; Fromherz, 'North Africa and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', p. 47. See also Brett, *The Berbers*, and Rogers, *A History of Anglo-Moroccan Relations*.

⁴³ *Ch. maj.*, II, 559.

⁴⁴ *Ch. maj.*, 559–60: 'Significans eidem, quod se et regnum suum libenter redderet eidem, et dederet et deditum teneret ab ipso, si placeret ei, sub tributo. Nec non et legem Christianam, quam vanam censuit, relinquens, legi Machometi fideliter adhaereret.'

the king of England told the caliph that he would willingly surrender himself and his kingdom. Later, there is a sentence which may be read as a kind of annotation to 'surrender' (redderet) which appears in the previous sentence. John would transfer to him, and would hold what has been transferred as a taxpayer 'et dederet et deditum teneret ab ipso'. The complete translation would be, then, 'telling him that he would willingly surrender his kingdom, both give up to him and hold what has been surrendered as tributary, if he pleased'.

This would yield an offer that accorded with feudal custom: John would make his kingdom a fief to be held henceforth by the Moroccan ruler and would subsequently pay taxes to him. This procedure was a common one in the feudal-political system which was always and in every context executed in exchange for protection. The verbs that appear in the accompanying sentence have a specific linguistic meaning. 'Reddere et tenere sub tribute' has a background in feudal law, and in fact it is a model that refers to delivery, provision, and maintenance in exchange for taxes, indicating an overall property tax.⁴⁵ Tax and tribute are obviously closely related, since it was difficult for a medieval ruler to pay tribute without first collecting the money from his subjects. Even so, the two terms are not synonymous, and the difference is important here. 'Tribute' has its own resonances in the Mediterranean context, especially in the context of relations between Muslim and Christian polities. The tradition in Islamic law on the validity of accepting tribute from residents of the House of War might inform this terminology and further contribute to our understanding of the instruments and implications of legal relations between the parties.⁴⁶ The text is entirely unrelated to subjugation. What we are looking at instead is a fairly standard offer of a defensive alliance tied into John's concerns about protecting his holdings in south-western France from Philip Augustus. Al-Nāṣir, for his part, sought benign neutrality from a significant power on the northern flank of the kingdom of Castile, which he was planning to attack in the summer of 1212 (as I will detail in Chapter 3).

Hence, in one sense, I agree with the many historians who maintain that the story opens with a proposal involving two acts on John's part. I diverge, however, in the detail. Whereas historians generally define the two acts as the

⁴⁵ Epstein, 'Rodney Hilton, Marxism and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism'. See detailed discussion in Chapter 5.

⁴⁶ Köhler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers*, pp. 268–312; Hamidullah, *The Muslim Conduct of State*, pp. 106–14. Köhler contrasts the legal relationship such as those that existed between Christian and Muslim states in Spain where sovereignty of Christian rulers was recognized, with those that existed in the Middle East (see pp. 283–84).

delivery of the kingdom and an additional act of religious conversion, I offer an alternative translation which has the advantage of syntactical coherence, and continuity between what has been considered as two separate components in John's offer. Paris writes, 'and [he will do that] leaving the Christian law which he valued as vain, and would faithfully adhere to the Muhammadan law'. John offered that 'he will do that', that is, he would follow the feudal procedure entailed in his becoming the caliph's vassal in exchange for protection, while leaving aside the Christian doctrine associated with this procedure. The present participle 'leaving aside' (*relinquens*) describes the circumstances of the main verbs in the previous part of the sentence.

Within the Christian orbit, the feudal agreements signed between Christian overlords and vassals involved the homage ceremony. The formal acceptance of overlordship was usually combined with an oath of fealty, which was suffused with Christian religious proceedings and symbolism. Rather than suggesting subjugation and conversion, John seems to have offered to forgo these Christian ritual elements found in the 'canonical' feudal agreements. Indeed, he likely regarded those ritual elements as irrelevant in the context of a political agreement with a Muslim ruler. Further, he might well have offered to accept, in this possible communication between England and the Almohads, the requirements of Muslim law regarding contracts with Christian kingdoms, where neither intention nor fulfillment was necessarily conveyed by a symbolic religious act and secured by the publicity of a ceremony.⁴⁷ Read in this way, the text itself mitigates against the plausibility of a conversion offer. John delivers his diplomatic policy proposal orally via the members of the delegation, backed by the customary letter. A short explanation of a few Latin terms is now in order.

During the period in which Paris wrote, the term *lex* was commonly used by ecclesiastic writers to describe religion, and notions of religion and of law were at that time strongly interrelated.⁴⁸ Admittedly, the general understanding of terms such as *lex Sarracenorum* or *lex Christianorum* was 'the religion of the Saracens' or the 'religion of the Christians'.⁴⁹ *Lex* was used during the Middle Ages to denote religion, especially in the framework of polemics, and in English medieval sources written in Latin, the term appears regularly in

⁴⁷ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 454–73.

⁴⁸ Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, IV, 80: 'Lex Christiana, passim in Cod. Theod. Pro Christiana Religione'.

⁴⁹ Denison Ross does not distinguish between the terms and translates them all as 'faith'; see his *An Embassy from King John to the Emperor of Morocco*, pp. 555–59. See also Howard, 'Islam and Christianity'.

regard to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam only.⁵⁰ However, when Paris allegedly cited Erdington's description of the English kingdom (paragraph 5), he wrote that 'Our church indeed and the practice of our religion prospers more than anywhere else in the world.' Here he used 'nostrae cultus religionis', that is, the word *religio* rather than the word *lex* to denote Christian religion. This sharpens the contrast between the Christian as well as the Muslim law which appears in John's proposition, referring to the ritual component of the treaty, and the Christian religion as understood by Paris himself.

Modern historians have seen support for the claim that Paris invented the entire delegation story in what they have considered to be a separate offer from John to the caliph to convert to Islam. Norman Daniel stands out among those historians in his description of the story as an evil tale, though a well-constructed one. Daniel claims that the credibility of the tale stems from the professional 'Orientalist' image held by the chronicler of the Muslim king-philosopher. This scholar is to some extent responsible for the notion that Paris's knowledge of Islam and interreligious polemics worked in great measure against him. Paris's cultural background was indeed very extensive, and included an acquaintance with a rich variety of sources. St Albans, the monastery where he lived and wrote, was an important junction for cultural transfer and boasted a wealth of documents. Paris himself was interested in polemics, was relatively facile with Christian theological issues, and wrote in the style of debate against both the Jews and the Muslims.⁵¹ Daniel presents Paris as the best-informed contemporary figure in England on Islam, as well as on Christian and Muslim polemics.⁵² Indeed, Paris may have had at his disposal many important sources. The converted Jew Petrus Alfonsi, who was well versed in Islamic culture, had lived in England for several years at the beginning of the twelfth century. Alfonsi was one of a number of prominent figures who provided Latin Europe with information about the Islamic world. A polymath whose writings also introduced Europe to Talmudic Judaism, Alfonsi spent time in the Malvern monastery, where he worked on scientific reports with Abbot Walcher.⁵⁴ He was an intellectual, a scientist, a physician to King Henry I, and the author of works

⁵⁰ *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, p. 1593: 'A religious system of teaching with reference to Judaism, Christianity and to Islam.' See Melamed, *Dat: From Law to Religion*, pp. 9–16, 36–79.

⁵¹ Marshall, 'Thirteenth Century Culture as Illustrated by Matthew Paris'.

⁵² Burnett, *The Introduction of Arabic Learning into England*; Melitzky, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, pp. 203–07, 224; *Matthew Paris's English History*, trans. by Giles, I, 14–28. See also Luchitskaya, 'Matthew Paris'.

such as *The Dialogues* and *Guide for a Clergyman*. Alfonsi was considered by the court to be one of the learned consultants to the king.⁵³ The transmission of materials about Islam in England also passed through central figures who took part in the great translation project on the Iberian frontier during the middle of the twelfth century, at the time of the Almoravids. European scholars were also influenced by rich Muslim learning in the period of the Almohads, notwithstanding the military conflicts among the parties.⁵⁴ The English had direct access to materials about Islam via scholars such as Robert of Ketton (the translator of the *Qurān* into Latin), Adelard of Bath, and others who had relatively reliable, up-to-date information on Islam.⁵⁵ It was also commonly known that Paris added his own information to Hildebert de Le Mans's essay 'Historia de Mahumete'.⁵⁶ The former also reported in his *Chronica maiora* that in the year 1253 several Muslim converts to Christianity arrived from the East to France. Perhaps he mentioned them because some information that they passed had also reached St Albans?⁵⁷ Paris personally received, probably from the East via Pope Gregory IX, a treatise that was either a version of the *Apology of al-Kindī* or document that was influenced by it. This treatise, known to modern scholars as the *Gregorian Report*, was recorded by Paris into the chronicles of St Albans. Among other things, the essay emphasized the honour Muḥammad allegedly accorded Christian Scriptures and to the practice of baptism.⁵⁸ Muslim scholars delving into the Christian Scriptures was a familiar topos in Christian medieval writings. Testimonies of Christians who visited the courts of Muslim rulers and who wrote first-hand accounts of these individuals were circulated throughout Latin Europe. Thus, for example in his essay 'Historia Damiatina', Oliver of Paderborn wrote about the Muslim clerics ('*ulamā*'), who reached Jerusalem and there admired the Christian gospel, reflecting the good laws of Christ. As someone who believed in the power of the written word to convince

⁵³ Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers*, pp. 9–11; Lacarra, *Estudios sobre Pedro Alfonso de Huesca*; Millás Vallicrosa, 'La aportación astronómica de Pedro Alfonso'; Valcarcel, 'Vita Mahometi'; Gautier Dalché, 'Islam et Chrétienté en Espagne'.

⁵⁴ Puig-Samper Mulero, 'Revolution and Tradition'.

⁵⁵ Metlitzky, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, pp. 13–46.

⁵⁶ Marshall, 'Thirteenth Century Culture as Illustrated by Matthew Paris', p. 471.

⁵⁷ *Ch. maj.*, v, 425.

⁵⁸ On the 'Gregorian Report', see Daniel, *Islam and the West* (1960), pp. 256–61; *Ch. maj.*, II, 343. See also Abel, 'L'Apologie d'Al-Kindī'; Powell, 'Matthew Paris, the Lives of Muhammad, and the Dominicans'; Giamalva, 'The Gregorian Report'. On Burchard of Strasbourg's *Veneratio Sarracenorum*, see Tolan, *L'Europe latine et le monde arabe*, pp. 97–108.

Muslims to convert to Christianity, Oliver wrote in a letter (*Epistula salutaris*) to the Ayyūbid Sultan Al-Kāmil Muḥammad that there are great similarities and much consensus around various theological topics between Christianity and Islam, and thus it is possible to find common ground between the two religions.⁵⁹ Apparently, on the basis of all these sources that could have been available to Paris, some modern historians have concluded that John's offer in the delegation story was nothing but satire, in Daniel's words, as 'the Muslim monarch contemptuously rejected the proposition of his unworthy Christian fellow king, whose morals and social circumstances he assailed with all the indignation and enthusiasm of one of John's own subjects'.⁶⁰

The Diplomats' Discussions with the Caliph: Questions and Responses

Paragraphs 4, 6, and 7 contain the monologues of the caliph. In these sections only is John described as a coward, traitor, tyrant, and lacking virility. And in these sections only is there a clear-cut statement about how John offered to subjugate England and to convert to Islam. In the framework of these sections the caliph also rejects John's offer in apparent indignation, stating that he is not interested in any dealing with a ruler such as him, and expels the diplomats in disgrace.

Other references, which apparently address the conversion in the following sections of the report, were understood by modern scholars as confirmation of such an offer and were used to support their readings. This is true for the expression *exlex*, with which the caliph conditionally referred to himself. The caliph told the diplomats that if he himself had been 'without law', he would have adopted and embraced Christianity: 'And he added: "The omniscient and omnipotent God, creator of all things knows that had I been bound by no law, I would choose that law before all others and having accepted it, would have embraced it".'⁶¹ This is also the case with respect to the expression *jam apostatae* (who has already apostatized), which appears in paragraph 8. The caliph responds angrily to Thomas of Erdington and abruptly dismisses him and Ralph. He refers to John as someone who has already taken the step of conversion.⁶²

⁵⁹ Oliver of Paderborn, *The Capture of Damietta*, trans. by Gavignan, chap. 55; Bird, 'Oliver of Paderborn', pp. 212–15, 224–29.

⁶⁰ Daniel, *Islam and the West* (1960), pp. 192, 228–31.

⁶¹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 560: 'Et addidit, Novit qui nihil ignorat Deus omnipotens omnium Creator, si exlex essem, illam prae omnibus eligerem, et acceptans amplexarer.'

⁶² *Jam apostatae* should in my opinion be translated as 'who has already apostatized' rather

These monologues, however, are very problematic. Without exception, they seem completely uprooted from their context. Paragraphs 6 and 7 are reactions on the part of the caliph to the responses of the diplomats regarding his questions. The reactions do not appear to have any connection to the responses, and they do not allow for the next question. Overall, the monologues read like a poorly written narrative. The caliph responds with a refusal to accept John's offer because of John's willingness to convert. It is here that the major problem with Paris's story unfolds. Following the proposal presented by the diplomats and after he started a theological discussion with the diplomats, the caliph continues to interrogate Erdington. Erdington offers a description of the kingdom that defies logic. As previously mentioned, all modern historians, from the Victorians onward, have read the words of the caliph as a response to John's proposal to convert. The caliph claims that he despises a person who is willing to abandon the religion of his ancestors. However, the caliph does not end the discussion there.

The delegation story involves three rounds, during each of which the caliph and the diplomats exchange questions and answers. These rounds themselves strain reason, in that after each round the caliph denies the possibility of re-engagement. Further, in each of the rounds the caliph asks one or several questions, receives a response, and reacts in an opposite manner from what is expected, that is, absurdly, with respect to the literary context itself. In other words, Paris's patches themselves become frayed. When we learn what Paris remembered he heard from the source that he had at hand, and from what Robert of London implanted into the original story while relating it to his friends in the monastery, we start to sense that something is wrong.

The first round of exchanges between the caliph and the diplomats ends with the caliph's theologically grounded refusal to accept the offer. After John's offer was presented orally and a letter was submitted with the same formula offered in writing, logic dictates that the story would have continued from the line which opens paragraph 5: 'He then inquired about the condition of the king of England and his kingdom.'⁶³ There is no rationale for the next question of the caliph, which opens a second round of discussion between him and the diplomats. As he has already refused the offer of communication with John,

than 'foolish apostate', as Giles had translated. According to the text, the caliph refers to King John as one who had already converted: 'Fama, sed potius infamia domini vestri jam apostatae desipientis, foetorem exhalat in conspectu meo tetrerrimum' (The reputation or rather the infamy of your king, who has already apostatized, makes me positively ill) (*Ch. maj.*, II, 562).

⁶³ *Ch. maj.*, II, 560.

questions about the king and his kingdom are pointless. In paragraph 4, the difficulties become even more striking. The Almohad caliph, ruler of one of the strongest powers in the region, was discovered considering the king of England's offer while reading the gospels in Greek, and his opening gambit is a colloquy on the strengths and weaknesses of Pauline Christianity. (In Chapter 2 we shall see that Paris's choice to leave uncorrected the mistaken understanding of Paul's ethnicity supports a historiographic argument.) Bishop William Stubbs, one of the most prominent of the Victorian historians, saw in the caliph's identification error proof that Paris documented the meeting verbatim. That is, Stubbs was thus persuaded of the chronicler's veracity, which then inclined him to believe that John indeed offered to subjugate England and convert to Islam. Norman Daniel, for his part, held that these points strengthened his argument that Paris invented the whole story. All in all, historians have generally left the Muslim ruler voiceless.

However, there is a way to return credence to the caliph. It lies in the use of external sources that shed light upon the Muslim ruler, amīr al-Mu'minīn. In light of biographical information found in an Arabic chronicle about the Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir, where it is recorded that his mother was a Christian slave, the entire 'theological discussion' assumes a sharp and highly personal edge. This section, with the caliph's simultaneous praise and condemnation of St Paul, can be understood by reading the text as an autobiographical expression of the ruler of the Almohad Empire. I will touch on this in detail in the next chapter.

Thomas of Erdington tells the caliph in the second round in paragraph 5 of a strong king who stands at the head of a prosperous kingdom. Apart from the unlikelihood of this round in light of the caliph's refusal of the offer, contradictions beset the body of the story. The first of these is the rosy glow in which Erdington bathes John, and the response of the caliph, which seem to imply that he did not hear the diplomat speaking. Then, too, Erdington's description utterly fails to reflect the reality of John's reign, regarding both the interdict and his struggle with the barons. And here we arrive at a nodal point. Historians read the passage as if Erdington, as the king's clerk, had authentically represented the king. The response of the caliph to the patriotic speech of Erdington, found in paragraph 6, cannot be understood as other than an invention of the chronicler. It presents John, in as sharp a contrast as possible to Erdington's description, as enslaved on his lands in England. In the face of a report of an idyllic kingdom subject to its sovereign, the caliph responds that this same king is seeking to transform from sovereign into slave. There appears to be no connection permitted between the kingdom's superpower status and

the king who stands at its helm. That king, we may recall, is called incompetent and worthless by the caliph.

The Almohad ruler has more odd things to say. He could not have understood the constitutional developments in England, and critically, these developments constituted an anachronistic element when made reference to in 1213. As the pages below will clarify, these terms became relevant only after the publication of Magna Carta in 1215. Our chronicler borrowed language from another period and placed it into the caliph's mouth so as to discredit the king. Despite this determination against John, the caliph forges on for yet a third round of questions with the English diplomats. Whereas in the first round the decision against John was related to his being a king willing to convert, and in the second round it was decided that he was unfit to rule as a sovereign, in the third round the caliph derisively inquires as to John's constitution and his ability to fulfill his role as general. In the beginning of paragraph 7 the caliph focuses on John himself: 'Afterward indeed, but with contempt, he inquired regarding the king's age, stature and strength.'⁶⁴ In Paris's telling of the story, we get the impression that it is Erdington who answered the caliph, since Robert remained quietly on the side. If this is the case, why did Paris insert lavish praise into the mouths of the delegation members, only to have them go through another long discussion about the desirable personal qualities in a ruler?

Once again, Erdington paints a pleasing picture of John. He describes the king of England as a strong, fifty-year-old man, able to rule and to lead an army into battle. And once again, the caliph, despite what he has heard, sketches a completely different image. John, he is told, is capable of being a general, yet he states that 'Within a decade, should he live so long, his strength will fail him before he has achieved any real work; if he should start now, he would break into pieces, and he shall avail for nothing [...]. He had better seek peace for himself and enjoy rest.'⁶⁵ The issue of age, mentioned by Paris and highlighted by the caliph, is important in this context and reflects the caliph's false tone. Erdington tells the caliph that John is fifty years old. Paris presumably knew that John had reached the age of fifty, but the caliph hones in on this and states that he already looks to be sixty. He brings up issues addressed neither by Erdington nor by the other chroniclers or sources that were at Paris's disposal.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561.

⁶⁵ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

⁶⁶ Thomas F. Madden has commented on this issue. He writes that 'Robert told the caliph that the king was "quinquagenarius" in age. If this is to be accepted strictly, it would fix the date

The reader is left with a strong sense of incongruity. John is depicted by Erdington as head of a prosperous kingdom and fit in all ways to lead it. The caliph acts as though he has not heard Erdington: he declares John to be wholly unfit and refuses the offer. Strangest of all, the caliph repeats his theological point and, in one of the story's numerous internal contradictions, speaks as if John has already converted.⁶⁷

As noted above, historians have located in this phrase evidence that John in fact did offer to convert. This, however, cannot be so, as it militates against the internal literary logic of the text. The caliph has sent away the diplomats and rejected the offer of an agreement. After three rounds of questioning, why would he return to the issue of religious conversion? The answer has much to do with our chronicler. As it turns out, the chronicler of St Albans had definite opinions about King John. Paris, who treated at length John's reconciliation with the pope and with the Church, found other, and quite creative, ways to express his hostility toward the king. His fingerprints are evident here, in the words he put into the caliph's mouth to highlight John's disgrace. The description of John as an outlaw (*exlex*) and apostate (*jam apostatae*) could have expressed, in this context, Paris's knowledge of the king's excommunication, in effect an ecclesiastical sentence of outlawry. However, by describing John as a Christian king who during a crisis in the Christian world attempted to ally with the Muslims, Paris remained loyal to his duties as an historian.

Of Which Fiefs Did Erdington Speak?

Here we shall look at a fragment from paragraph 2 ('telling him that he would wilfully surrender his kingdom, both give up to him and hold what has been surrendered as tributary, if he pleased')⁶⁸ and paragraph 5 in its entirety.⁶⁹ Also, I shall again bring a fragment from within paragraph 12.⁷⁰ Determining which kingdom is under discussion is the first order of business: while in paragraph 2 'the whole kingdom' is mentioned, in paragraph 5 the description clearly makes

of the occurrence to 1206, since John was born in 1166'. Perhaps Madden calculated wrongly. If the age was to be accepted, it would fix the date to 1216, when John turned fifty, not 1206 when he turned forty in age; *Matthei Parisiensis, Historia Anglorum*, ed. by Madden, II, pp. xi, n. 2.

⁶⁷ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

⁶⁸ *Ch. maj.*, II, 559.

⁶⁹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561.

⁷⁰ *Ch. maj.*, II, 565–66.

reference to the British Isles only (surrounded by sea; the absence of vineyards) and pointedly excludes the fiefs on the mainland. Erdington's comments about the kingdom of England make it clear that the duchies Aquitaine and Gascony, which were part of John's kingdom at that time, are not included in the description. Thus, an internal textual problem emerges: Which kingdom is alluded to by the head diplomat? Is it the kingdom of England on the British Isles, or lands of the English kingdom bordering Spain?

Erdington's description of England represents another, though highly related, difficulty. The last four sentences of paragraph 5, touching upon the relationship among the Crown, the Church, and the pope, could not have been describing the period of the interdict during which the delegation had taken place. The English Church is described as strong, good, and the most prosperous in the world, ruled in peace by ecclesiastical and civil laws. Historians, Victorian and modern alike, found this portrayal nonsensical. Not only was the Church, by the testimony of the chroniclers of St Albans, crushed by John, the contemporary chroniclers and modern historians knew that it was very difficult to implement papal law in the European kingdoms, and that civil laws at that period were almost irrelevant. Additionally, in the same paragraph in which Erdington is cited, odd comments are made, such as 'our people are distinguished of antiquity of being free and noble, and acknowledge the domination of no one except God'.⁷¹ These are strange words from the mouth of the delegation head who is not a religious figure, and they do not accurately describe the state of affairs in the kingdom of England during John's reign, prior to the publication of Magna Carta. A third difficulty pertains to the issue of the caliph's conquest of Spain's borders, with John's approval.⁷² In paragraph 2, John offers his kingdom; in paragraph 5, the kingdom is defined as the king's fiefs in the British Isles only. Paris's comments in paragraph 12, however, can only be understood as referring to John's proposal that the caliph would enter his fiefs that are located on the borders of Spain.

Beginning from the end, the third problem can be resolved by distinguishing between the delegation storyline as it is set out by Paris, and the description of the kingdom of England that he puts into Erdington's mouth. The storyline, the one that appears in paragraph 12, requires that the topic of discussion was continental territory. This is because Paris actually delineates the precise geographical location of John's kingdom. From the chronicler's words,

⁷¹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561: 'Regnum etiam ab inuncto et coronato gubernatum, ab antiquo liberum esse dinoscitur et ingenuum ad nullius praeterquam Dei spectans dominationem.'

⁷² *Ch. maj.*, II, 566.

it emerges that the 'kingdom' that John discussed is none other than his properties contiguous with the borders of Spain, these being the duchies of Gascony and Aquitaine, the only continental properties remaining in his hands after his defeat to Philip Augustus in 1206.

Further, through Erdington in paragraph 5, Paris betrays the fact that the kingdom described by the diplomats is not the kingdom (or territories in the kingdom) of the storyline. Erdington possibly refers to the duchies Aquitaine and (especially) Gascony only implicitly, but he likely refers to these lands as those where vineyards are cultivated and from which wine is brought to England.⁷³ Until 1204, wine also came from Normandy and Anjou. Subsequent to the loss of these properties, however, Gascony was very nearly England's sole source of wine.⁷⁴ Thus, Erdington must have been describing England and not the Angevin properties on the continent. It seems that Paris totally scrambled the story.

Understanding Erdington's entire speech as an anachronistic interpolation properly relating to the 1240s, the period in which Paris wrote the *Chronica majora*, resolves both the first and second difficulties. And now that it is clear that Robert of London could not have uttered 'Erdington's' words as Paris records them, we may surmise that this section of text reflected Paris's perspective more than it did John's. That is, the simplest way to explain Erdington's speech is as a description of the English patriotism that the chronicler experienced personally in the 1240s. Paradoxically, all that Paris describes, such as the consolidation of the British Isles and the taking control of the Church, must be credited to King John. Paris wove the story in such a way that it would be internally consistent to him. In doing so, the chronicler himself formulated Erdington's speech. This is true whether it was done as a complement to Robert's true memoirs, or as an addition to gossip fragments and rumours. In either case, Paris 'reported' a reality that was unthinkable before the end of the interdict and prior to the reconfirmation of Magna Carta during the days of John's son and successor, Henry III. Below, we shall see why.

⁷³ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561.

⁷⁴ Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, pp. 365–66. A similar description of economic exchange between France and England, and indication of the fact that vines do not grow in the island's cold climate, appear in 'The Book of Geography' (*Kitāb al-jughbrāfiya*) by Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī, a thirteenth-century historian and geographer who travelled from al-Andalus to Egypt. See König, 'Arabic-Islamic Perceptions of Western Europe', p. 26, and Monferrer Sala, 'Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī'. For Arabic text, see Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī, *Kitāb al-jughbrāfiya*, ed. by al-'Arabī, pp. 181, 200.

Terms in Rapid Transition: The Word 'Free' vis-à-vis the Barons

Erdington informs the caliph that the people of the kingdom are 'free'.⁷⁵ The caliph responds that he has never heard of a free kingdom that sought to voluntarily pay taxes.⁷⁶ On the contrary, he read and heard about many who have purchased for themselves freedom at the cost of blood.⁷⁷ But King John was referred to as someone who was willing to exchange freedom for servitude.⁷⁸ The terms used here require contextualization. In the delegation story, the phrase 'free man' is used in an anti-feudal context, similar to the way in which it is used later on, in Magna Carta, especially in the influential section 39, *Nullus liber homo*.⁷⁹ However, prior to the presentation of Magna Carta following the rebellion of the barons in 1215, the word *liber* was used in England in particular and in Europe in general, to denote city dwellers. These residents, like the Jews, belonged to the 'royal chamber'.⁸⁰ The word *liber* expressed the special, non-feudal relationship between the king and a group of subjects in the kingdom, and was used in reference to the barons as well, despite their being essentially free people only after the presentation of Magna Carta. David Carpenter emphasizes, in his analysis of the charter, that only the 'free people' — that is, the barons — were by law guaranteed the conditions set out in this paragraph.⁸¹

⁷⁵ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561.

⁷⁶ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561: 'Nunquam audiui [...] ut de libero faceret tributarium' (I have never heard of any king [...] who would ruin his sovereignty by making tributary a country that is free).

⁷⁷ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561: 'Quinimmo de multis legi et audiui, quod multi sanguinis effusione et profluvio sibi libertatem quod laudabile fuit, comparent' (Rather, on the contrary I have often read and heard of many who gained liberty for themselves with much effusion and pouring of their blood, which is laudable).

⁷⁸ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561: 'qui nullo nullior est de libero servus fieri desiderat' (who is less than a nobody, wishes to turn from a free man into a slave).

⁷⁹ Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 53: 'Nullus liber homo decetero capiatur vel inprisonetur aut disseisiatur de aliquo libero tenemento suo vel libertatibus vel liberis consuetudinibus suis, aut utlagetur, aut exulet, aut aliquo alio modo destruat, nec super eum ibimus, nec super eum mittemus, nisi per legale iudicium parium suorum, vel per legem terre. Nulli vendemus, nulli negabimus aut differemus rectum vel justiciam' (No free man is to be arrested, or imprisoned, or disseised or outlawed, or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we go against him. Nor will we send against him, save by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land).

⁸⁰ Williams, *Medieval London*, pp. 1–8.

⁸¹ Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 290–91: 'The Charter as a whole was granted "to all freemen", a vast and diverse group of people, including many peasants [...]. There, however, was

Thus, the reality that is described in the text is not the reality of England in 1212 during which the delegation assembly occurred, and the word *liber* which is found in the text, is an anachronism.⁸²

Did the Caliph Reject or Accept John's Offer?

In paragraph 8 Paris writes that 'the prince then, after weighing all the questions and replies of the emissaries, after a brief interval, having indicated his great indignation by mocking gestures, scorned King John, saying: "That king is no king but a little king, in senile decay and growing old, nor do I trouble myself about him; he is unworthy of any alliance with me"'.⁸³ And then in paragraph 12, Paris writes that the caliph had not planned on reaching the borders of Spain but rather did so only after he received John's consent.

Thus, we have a new contradiction. What was Paris thinking when he wrote these lines, and is there any consistency in this part of his storyline? More confusing still, we learn in paragraph 12 that the caliph did not send the emissaries away curtly, and that he may have concluded negotiations with John in a pact. The surprising term 'ally' or 'worthy of being an ally' (*mihi confederari*) disrupts the internal logic of the story. After the diplomats laud John and his kingdom, the caliph refuses any communication with him, contemptuously calling him a 'tiny king', fading and moribund. However, when Paris records the caliph's refusal, he uses a term that may bring us to another conclusion. Let us recall the beginning of the current chapter. I contended that Paris had a vested interest in demonstrating that John not only refrained from showing up at the front for the Christian war against Muslims, but that the king of England multiplied his crimes by offering the Muslims assistance. Paris describes that assistance, and,

the rub. For it was the law itself which held the unfree in thrall, denying them access to the king's courts. Only freemen conspicuously benefited from the promises in chapter 39, and freemen, as we have seen, were the grantees of the Charter'; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. vii–viii, 135.

⁸² In 1244, when Paris was busy writing his chronicle, the barons organized themselves and presented Henry III with an offer of reform such that they themselves would function as a body that would look out for the needs of the kingdom. It was called, in retrospect, the 'paper constitution', since it brought about no concrete results. Paris addressed the structural change of the form of government, which during his time seemed to have great importance. See Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, as well as Carpenter, 'Archbishop Langton and Magna Carta'; Scammell, 'The Formation of the English Social Structure'; Lawrence, 'The Thirteenth Century'.

⁸³ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

for that matter, when he notes John's consent, he confirms that indeed an agreement may have been signed between the rulers and that John's fiefs were at the Almohads' disposal on the northern flank of the kingdom of Castile.

Understanding Paris's intentions helps to explain the contradiction between the conventional reading of the story, that the caliph expelled the delegation in disgrace, and what we read in paragraph 12, that he may have signed the agreement with John. As Paris wished to denigrate John and present his failure as related to the conversion proposal, he would not have recorded the story of the delegation in the *Chronica majora* if he thought the delegation had failed simply due to internal reasons. The last round of questions and responses hold the key. We now return to paragraph 8, where we read the phrase 'have me as an ally' (mihi confoederari). Here again we find a discrepancy between what Paris intended to write and what the text itself reveals. Against accepted historiography, which maintains that the caliph refused John's offer, a linguistic analysis yields that John offered the Muslim caliph a mutual alliance, and the caliph responded in similar terms. The bilateral character emerging from the diplomatic political proposal that John presented to the caliph using the formula of 'ally' in this context, is consistent with the words 'voluntarily' (libenter) and 'should he want' (si placeret ei) that are found in the text in paragraph 2. These terms reinforce the sense of reciprocity, of an alliance already developing in the story, and further weaken the notion of the subjugation of one party to another.

When allowing the text to reveal what 'really' occurred, the question of the refusal or the acceptance of the offer is resolved. An absolute absence of political enslavement or religious conversion in paragraph 2, in the fragments of paragraph 12 and in paragraph 8, yields two principal points. First, we learn that the caliph entered Spain with the goal of reaching 'the Spanish borders' (i.e., the borders of the north wherein the duchy of Gascony was located, granted under the direct control of the king of England), although implicitly, it appears that he saw in John an ally, and John as stated, agreed that he would pass through his properties and that he may collect revenues therefrom, all in exchange for protection. Second, we learn from the two references to 'statements made above', which appear in paragraph 12, that the term 'ally' in paragraph 8 reflects Paris's view that John's offer was an acceptable political diplomatic contract. According to this agreement, if the caliph subdued the Christian kingdom between his and John's properties, then, in the interests of the Muslims in their attack on Christian territories, and in the interests of John in his continental fiefs, the two kingdoms would benefit from their common enemies. (In the fourth chapter I will expand on the historical background of the battle of

Las Navas, its results and their implications for the completion of the delegation's mission, and on points that support the existence of negotiations, if not an actual agreement between England and the Almohads.) The term 'have me as an ally' also implies that the caliph's refusal was unrelated to the issue of religious conversion, and most critically it indicates that the theological ideas must have been broached at a later point — probably in the conversation with Robert of London — and not at all where Paris recorded it, at the beginning of the story. We shall now take a careful look at that conversation.

The Caliph and Robert of London

Prior to engaging with Robert of London, the caliph terminated his conversation with the knight diplomats and dismissed them. I am referring to the fragment in paragraph 8: 'and then turning to Thomas and Ralph with fierce countenance, he said: "Do not return again to my presence, nor shall your eyes further behold my face."'”⁸⁴ This is puzzling behaviour for any ruler, and the problems in the narrative continue. After the three interrogative rounds, further communication seems patently unwarranted. How are we to understand the caliph's rejection of an alliance with John alongside his querying of the third of the diplomats, Robert of London, about the very same person?

In this phase of the story, in paragraph 9, the narrator intervenes and describes the third diplomat in the English delegation, Robert of London, with respect to whom the caliph's curiosity was piqued because 'while the others were speaking, he had until now remained silent and at a distance'.⁸⁵ Paris writes that the caliph conversed with Robert about the issues: 'He thus retained him while the others were sent away, and spoke with him in secret of many things, which Robert later revealed to his friends.'⁸⁶ Thus, the text is explicit that 'his friends' are the two delegation members that remained, and the report of its content occurred immediately upon ending the conversation with the caliph. In the last lines of this paragraph, we are informed that the caliph and Robert discussed many other issues, but this time it is said that Robert recounted them in full detail to his friends in England: 'The king discussed with Robert many issues besides this, which he afterwards revealed to his friends in England.'⁸⁷ Then, in

⁸⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

⁸⁵ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

⁸⁶ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

⁸⁷ *Ch. maj.*, II, 563.

paragraph 10 we are told that the members of the delegation reported to King John very disheartening news, per what Robert told them. This makes sense in light of the above, and Robert, who is once again found standing on the side, silent in John's court, just as he had been in the caliph's, was actually the one to tell John things that would please him, and even shared his presents, apparently telling John that the caliph sent them to him.⁸⁸

Here, we might consider that distortions might well have crept in as Robert of London was recounting his tale. As well, Paris may not have fully understood what he heard, and likely too, in consideration of the textual difficulties we clearly see, wrote up the material in a way that suited his own intentions. Robert, as described by Paris, spoke ill of John whenever possible. Further, the story that he related to his friends in England differed from the one he told to the two other diplomats immediately subsequent to his conversation with the caliph. This is an example of the kind of quote I mentioned earlier: the caliph's opinion of Robert's wisdom might be part of Robert's report that was remembered by Paris while he was writing. Perhaps, for instance, Robert boasted in front of his friends in St Albans that he was summoned by the caliph despite his repulsive appearance. Paris also wrote that Robert told John 'pleasing things', in contrast to the reports of the other members of the delegation. In this, the source is consistent with the story both in regard to the success of the delegation, and in regard to what actually happened, that is, that an agreement may have been signed. This agreement pertained to an alliance between John and the Almohads, which did not, in the end, come to fruition due to military and political developments at the confrontation in Las Navas.

Nonetheless, in his persona as the monk who excoriates John at every turn, Paris once again could not resist temptation and possibly changed what he had really heard from Robert. The story runs that while the two diplomats conversed with the caliph, Robert of London, the monk, stood quietly to the side. After the caliph supposedly dismissed them, and offered his opinion about the monk, he summoned him and engaged him in conversation. The caliph then makes a curious comment pertaining to truth, Christians, and clerics.⁸⁹ I suggest that this statement is related to one of the following issues. First, it is possible that Robert already mentioned that he himself was a convert, thus the caliph broached the subject with him. Among other things, he referred to his own biographical background, and so this appears to be the most plausible rea-

⁸⁸ *Ch. maj.*, II, 564.

⁸⁹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

son as to why they would have had a 'theological discussion' at this point. This discussion, however, placed where it was by Paris, appears too early in the text for logical consistency. The theological dialogue needs to flow into a discussion between the caliph and Robert, since Robert is the one that the caliph recognized as a monk, and perhaps even as a converted Jew. They discussed conversion and many other religious issues, some of which, as I suggest in Chapter 2, may have been based on the caliph's thorough acquaintance with the Islamic anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemical tradition. The second, and very strong, possibility is also related to Robert's status as a convert. Perhaps the caliph turned to Robert with the goal of ascertaining just how much he could count on the agreement, not only with John but also on the one that he already had — unknown to Paris — with Sancho of Navarre. In other words, the Muslim might have asked the diplomat-monk, in as much as he was a converted Jew, to what extent the caliph could rely on his Christian allies. Paris pointed out that the caliph negotiated with John because of the interdict. As appears from paragraph 12, he noticed that the Muslims recognized the force that the papacy could have exerted on the Christian rulers. Even without reference to Sancho being under papal ban, at the same time, Paris accurately reported the Muslim's attempt to divide the Christian camp. The North African Muslim chronicles of the late twelfth century and the thirteenth century — including those of Ibn Sāhib al-Salāa (d. after 1198), *Al-Mann bi-l-'imāma*, 'Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī (d. after 1224), *Al-Mu'jib*, and Ibn al-Qattān (thirteenth century), *Naẓm al-jum'ān*, as well as Ibn 'Idārī, (thirteenth century) *Al-Bayān al-mughrib* —, as Jim Eisenbraun puts it, 'offer many examples of Christians portrayed almost exclusively as enemies who stimulate feelings of hostility, suspicion and disapproval'.⁹⁰ The caliph Muḥammad al-Nāṣir had personal experience with Christian unreliability. After the battle of Alarcos in 1195, for example, both sides of the battling forces agreed to exchange prisoners, and while al-Nāṣir kept his promise and returned the Christian captives, Alfonso VIII failed to uphold his side of the agreement.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Eisenbraun, 'Christian Success and Muslim Fear', pp. 162–63, 173: 'The historian al-Yasā' b. Ḥazm's (d. 1179 or 1199) [...] main aim in his chronicle was to prove that Christians were not to be trusted, as they could be shown to have systematically broken the treaties concluded with the Muslims'.

⁹¹ Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII with the Almohads', p. 13 n. 8.

Who Was the 'Real' Foe in Paris's View?

From the analysis of fragments of paragraphs 9 and 10 above, it seems that Paris was highly involved in the construction of the delegation report. However, another difficulty emerges in paragraph 11, where Paris writes: 'and related all that had been said, in the earshot of Matthew, who has written and related these events'.⁹² Suddenly, the story of the delegation is reversed. On the one hand, Paris emphasizes that he heard the story straight from the source, from one who was part of the delegation and witnessed all the events; on the other hand, the chronicler removes himself from responsibility for the narrative. This seems to be so not only because of possible memory lapses, but, mostly, because it strips Robert of credibility. Paris presents him as a fraud and a godless crook. In fact, already within the story of the delegation he hints that Robert is a converted Jew, and, as I suggested earlier, attributes to him the characteristics of a Jew as seen through the eyes of a thirteenth-century clergyman.⁹³

In regard to the literary reversal in paragraph 11, the most likely explanation is that Paris is actually describing the bare facts about Robert of London being a converted Jew. What Paris says is that at some point, probably more than a decade prior to the date on which he started writing the *Chronica majora*, he heard Robert's story as Robert related it to his friends. Years later, he reconstructed his memories, and as part of the addition to the folio he inserted the story of the delegation to Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*. In Chapter 2 we will learn a great deal about Robert, of the possibility that he is a converted Jew and about his recounting to friends in the monastery the delegation story. Once again, in paragraph 12, Paris shoulders the yoke of the responsible historian. In this paragraph, as we have already seen, Paris records dates, places, and historical context with due precision; however, he imposes on his sources the responsibility for the details of the delegation story. And thus we have consistency, at least from Paris's point of view, regarding the sharp transition from the criticism of John to the criticism of Robert. And unlike the disjointed and missing information concerning the relationship of John with the Muslims, the information about the exploits of Robert of London in St Albans was readily available and quite detailed.

Does the text itself speak of England's subjugation and of conversion? On both counts, the answer is an unequivocal 'no'. There is no offer to subjugate

⁹² *Ch. maj.*, II, 564.

⁹³ Menache, 'Matthew Paris's Attitudes toward Anglo Jewry'.

England and no offer to convert to Islam. My reading of the text rather supports the likelihood of the delegation's mission as part of English-Almohad negotiations. The reference to the kingdom of England only raises an internal textual problem. The narration of the story that Paris completed in paragraph 12 requires that John's offer to the caliph entail any territories which would assist the caliph in his war against the Christian coalition, that is, the duchies of Gascony and Aquitaine. Had the delegation taken place, as the text itself reveals, it involved only these territories. The delegation being sent at that time rests on the assumption that the military collision would end in a Muslim victory, and Paris knew from the *Barnwell Chronicle* that this was the case, as noted above. After the expected victory of the Muslims, the Almohad forces would move towards the thoroughfare of the Pyrenees and through the properties of John on the borders of Spain. However, Paris completely confused the story. He had Erdington talk about the kingdom of England in the British Isles, though there is little chance that he ever thought that John would encumber the Isles to the Muslims. Erdington spoke to the caliph about the kingdom of England and not about its fiefs, which were relevant to the deal at hand. Paris used the term 'ally' in connection with the caliph's answer to John's proposal, but instead of a positive response (as is also obvious from the above, clearly stated in paragraph 12), Paris got himself mixed up with three rounds of progressively irrelevant questions from the caliph. The 'theological discussion' found in the beginning (paragraph 4) of the delegation story has been taken by historians as cardinal support for their reading of John's offer of conversion. Victorian and contemporary historians have made various uses of this paragraph, but when the true nature of the offer is recognized, not only does the alternative reading of the story suggest a different interpretation than the ones suggested so far, it also supports the plausibility of the delegation.

As mentioned, even if Paris fabricated the entire delegation story, he was obliged to weave it from the raw material he had at his disposal. If so, the chronicler, who was perhaps acquainted with such agreements and likely knew from Howden of the one between Sancho and the caliph, could have rewritten the story as John's offer to the caliph. The text reveals an offer for an agreement along the lines of the one made by Sancho and the caliph, which was built on a sort of regional defence pact in which the Almohads guaranteed the territorial integrity of Navarre and Sancho's rule in exchange for Navarre's use as a strategic ally in their struggle with Castile and Aragon. Nonetheless, if the delegation was actually sent, and Robert of London did participate and then recounted the story in St Albans, at which time Paris overheard and then recorded it from memory more than a decade later, the nature of the proposal

remains the same. In any case, John offered to the caliph no less and no more than a strategic alliance. Thus, the historian is finally relieved of two major burdens. These burdens pertain to the second and third circles in this chapter, both of which are coming to a close. In the centre of the second circle stood the centuries-long question of whether the delegation story is fact or fiction. Anticlimactically, the answer is that it does not really matter, because, fact or fiction, the nature of the offer was unaffected. However, the evidence inclines us toward the affirmative, subject to the limitations of Paris as an historian. Much lies between the delegation story as complete truth and the delegation story as total fabrication. In either case, whether Paris fabricated everything while he took advantage of rumours that made the rounds while he wrote the chronicle, knowing that those stories had no basis and still arranging them to suit his needs, or whether everything that he wrote was true, Paris, in his role as historian, had sufficient reason to believe that the source spoke the truth and was part of the delegation, that his memory was sharp and clear, and that he presented the information without concern for the opinions of others. A careful, critical reading of the text coupled with the historical background, as I set out in the following chapters, confirms the latter. It positions Paris as someone who wrote with a particular ideological bent, most likely not recording verbatim what he heard from Robert of London.⁹⁴ The third circle, at the centre of which stood the question of whether or not the delegation was actually sent, is also at least partially closed. A close analysis of the text has revealed that such a delegation indeed could have occurred; however, a full sense of the highly intricate historical-theological interaction that took place in our story will only emerge from the next chapter, as we evaluate Robert of London as the king's clerk and possibly a converted Jew.

The Delegation Story as a Means of Resolving the Enduring Difficulties in Historians' Presentations of John

At first blush, the delegation story in Paris's chronicle appears to be quite a minor segment in John historiography. In point of fact, the story has attracted the attention of most historians who have written about the king. Very simply, the story

⁹⁴ Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 12–18. Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History', pp. 259, 261–64, 268, 272, 274–75: 'What this means is that he rarely made up things entirely, but that his desire to offer a moral interpretation also required him to present events in a manner that made their deeper meaning, their ethical value and message, discernible to his readers.' Carpenter, 'Chronology and Truth', p. 2 n. 13 and pp. 6–8.

has served multiple goals. For the Victorians, it proved John's villainy; for contemporary historians, it exposed the villainy of the chroniclers and the Victorians in their harsh judgement of John. The agenda of modern historians included, aside from the rehabilitation of John's image, a degree of sympathy for him, and especially a desire to correct the 'tendentious' Victorian historiography. Naturally, historians of every period are driven by various persuasions, but, strikingly, in every era these have ended in a conventional reading of the story that involves John's proposal to subjugate the kingdom of England and convert to Islam.⁹⁵

King John's historiography is in fact embedded within the historiography of the delegation story. Historians' tendency to read in Paris's text a proposal by John to subjugate the kingdom of England to the caliph of Morocco and to convert to Islam stands on its own: it is unrelated to how they assess the truth value of the story. They were not inclined to heed the injunction of Paris to engage with the delegation story in the historical context in which it is situated: first and foremost, in the context of the military encounter at Las Navas. In this we find a simple explanation of the problem that was raised in the introduction. That is, the manner in which historians have presented John's entire reign is anchored in the way that they have dealt with the delegation story. Historians, despite differences in the period in which they wrote, despite their use of improved historiographic tools, despite the accumulation of hindsight and despite expanding perspectives, first read in the story an offer of subjugation and conversion, and then discuss whether or not the delegation indeed occurred, did it fail or succeed in its mission, and further discuss John as either rogue or master of realpolitik.

The text of the delegation story subsumes all the measures taken during John's reign. Thus, it is possible to reduce the overall discussion of John's conduct and the profound political and diplomatic changes of his time, to the 'case study' of the delegation. The story makes reference to the king's measures in the sphere of protecting the territory of the kingdom of England; that is, did John offer to subjugate the fiefs or attempt to protect them? There are clear expressions in the delegation story of John's measures in establishing the bureaucracy and governance structure: for example, the appearance of diplomats and the

⁹⁵ Historians working within the framework of frontier were mostly expected to discuss this story using appropriate methodology: see Lewis, 'The Closing of the Medieval Frontier'; Burns, 'The Significance of the Frontier in the Middle Ages', pp. 311–19; Feliciano, 'Introduction: Interrogating Iberian Frontiers', pp. 325–28; Liang, 'Unity and Diversity across the Strait of Gibraltar', pp. 23–25. See also Adam J. Kosto's recent discussion of the Frontier frame work in his 'Reconquest, Renaissance and the Histories of Iberia'.

description of the appointment by the king of Robert of London as custodian over St Albans. There are references to his measures pertaining to relations of the Crown with the barons, his excessive involvement in the interdict and contemporary royal policies, and finally there is reference to John's measures pertaining to the relations of the Crown with the Church and the pope.

The Historians' Paradox and the Delegation Story

Embedded within the text of the delegation story are pieces of information that can be corroborated through cross-checking of sources. The most prominent examples of this have already been identified by Victorian historians in the persons of Thomas of Erdington and Robert of London. Both served, as indicated by the royal records, as senior officials in John's administration. These and later historians only partially pursued the inquiry, and in fact other pieces of information were quite abundant in the chronicle. Despite the picture that emerges from the intersection of archival sources with Paris's chronicle, the conventional view remained that of John's proposition of conversion. One of the reliable sources of the period, the writings of Richard I, John's brother and his predecessor on the throne of England, records some proposals put forth in the negotiations between the Crusaders, led by the king of England, and al-Malik al-Ādil. One of these proposals entailed the marriage of Richard's sister, Joan, to Sultan Saladin. According to this plan, Richard then would have transferred to the couple control of the coastal area of the Holy Land. In feudal Europe, marriage was one of the most popular ways to solve political problems and conduct diplomacy. Had the conversion in Paris's story been associated with marriage as a means for John to acquire territory, it might have been considered plausible, but such conversion in the context of relinquishing properties seemed absurd.

The interpolation of actual events in the story on the one hand, and the acceptance of John's alleged intention to convert to Islam on the other, drove historians to the conclusion that they were dealing with a very problematic document which they were forced to present as either a highly sophisticated fiction or a poorly recorded historical event. Thus, what I term the 'historians' paradox and the delegation story' was developed; that is, the historians who present the story of the mission as historical documentation of an event that occurred themselves strengthen the argument that the story is absurd, while historians who argue that the story is fabricated adduce arguments that support the feasibility of the mission. A review of the delegation story's historiography will clarify the point.

*The Victorian Historians: The Delegation Story
is a Historical Record of an Actual Event*

Already in 1826, historian John Lingard treated Paris's text of the delegation as historical documentation of actual events, and he discussed the political-diplomatic array of English foreign relations in John's time. Lingard writes that

in this there is probably much exaggeration; but it would be difficult to determine the precise limits at which the desperation of a prince would stop, who with John's disposition should find himself in John's circumstances. To check therefore the hostility of the king of France [...] and to fortify himself against the pope, he solicited the aid of Mohammed al Nassir [...] who by his conquests in Spain had threatened to extirpate Christianity from the south of Europe.

Later, Lingard contributes his opinion on the absurdity of the story and wrote that John's statement included ('if we may believe') the offer of the English king to transfer the Crown of England to the caliph and accept the faith of Muhammad.⁹⁶ A few years later, in 1829, Richard Thomson published his influential *An Historical Essay on the Magna Carta*. Thomson also presents the delegation story as reliable documentation and discusses the feasibility of an actual English delegation to the caliph of Morocco in light of the pressure under which John found himself.⁹⁷

A decade later, in 1839, historian Sharon Turner published *The History of England in the Middle Ages*. Turner writes in regard to the delegation story that if the purpose of the delegation was to request assistance from the Muslims against John's barons, it is indeed historical documentation of an actual event. He pointed out that at different times both the German emperor and the Greek emperor were assisted by the Muslim forces against their Catholic enemies.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Lingard, *A History of England*, III, 27–28.

⁹⁷ Thomson, *An Historical Essay on the Magna Carta*, pp. 483–84.

⁹⁸ Turner, *The History of England in the Middle Ages*, I, 385–86: 'The actions of John are best accounted for on the supposition that he was deranged. And this idea gives some probability to a circumstance, which of other English kings would be thought impossible.' Turner also notes: 'If this embassy had merely been to have asked the assistance of the Muslim against his barons, it would have been credible, for the emperor of Germany in this age employed Saracens in his army against Milan, and the Graecian emperor more than once sought aid from the Turks; but that John should have offered to embrace Mahomedanism and to make his kingdom tributary, was either an exaggeration of the dark-visaged ambassador, or must be referred to a paroxysm of insanity. Such however was his real history, that he lived without respect and died unlamented' (no. 42).

In an introduction written in 1873 for the *Historical Collections of Walter of Coventry*, Stubbs recounts at length his piercing criticism of John. In the same work, the author states that the delegation story is fundamentally flawed. However, it was specifically the problems that Stubbs saw that strengthened the story's credibility, and he writes that

it is difficult to regard the embassy of John to the emperor of Morocco as altogether fabulous, in the teeth of the evidence adduced by Matthew Paris. Thomas of Erdington, Ralph fitzNicolas, and Robert of London, whom he names as the envoys, were real persons, and the first of them was employed on an embassy to Rome in the very year, 1213, in which this transaction is placed.⁹⁹

Like Stubbs, so too did Sir Thomas Madden make only casual mention of the story. In a critical introduction for the edition he prepared of Paris's treatise, *Historia Anglorum*, Madden refers to the period in which Paris entered the monastery as a monk and his access to first-hand knowledge of the events which had occurred years before: 'He [Paris] enters under the year 1213 the singular story of King John's mission to Mohammed al-Nassir.' Madden was certain that Paris did not invent the story and even thought that some of the persons who heard it were probably living at the time when he wrote it down.¹⁰⁰

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, historian Edward Denison Ross treated in detail Paris's delegation story. In an article from 1924, which was in fact the first of the very few monographs written specifically about the story of the delegation, Denison Ross concentrates on the dating possibilities of the English delegation to Morocco: 'The embassy of King John, if it went to Morocco and found the Moorish king in his capital, must have arrived either before A.D. 1211 or after A.D. 1213, January.'¹⁰¹

Contemporary Historians: The Delegation Story is Compelling in its Nastiness, and is Credible

Sidney Painter made reference to Paris's delegation story in his 1949 work on John and his reign. Within the context of a discussion about John's mistress and his illegitimate offspring, Painter notes that Paris recorded in the name

⁹⁹ *Memoriale Fratris Walteri de Coventria*, ed. by Stubbs, pp. xii–xiii, lxxxiii; Campbell, 'William Stubbs (1825–1901)'.

¹⁰⁰ *Mathei Parisiensis, Historia Anglorum*, ed. by Madden, II, p. xi n. 2.

¹⁰¹ Ross, 'An Embassy from King John', pp. 558–59; Warren, *King John*, pp. 13–15.

of one of the king's officers, a Robert of London, a harsh description of the adulterous queen. Painter relies on historical arguments that had already been brought up by the Victorians, with regard to the historical admissibility of the delegation story. Hence, he finds it difficult to accept at face value the words of Robert of London, and admits to the problematic nature of Paris's report. Painter thus discusses Robert of London as someone who may have been referring to historical events, yet as an historian he is unwilling to go on record in regard to the question of whether or not the delegation occurred.¹⁰²

Lewis W. Warren's 1961 biography of John is considered one of the century's most important works on this king's reign. Warren began his book with an attempt to trace the sources of the negativity attributed to the king by nineteenth-century historians. He addresses the delegation story, which serves, from his point of view, as an example that proves the rule. Warren maintains that the stories of Wendover and Paris, his successor chronicler in St Albans, have echoed through the corridors of history for their slanderous character. Warren sees Paris as a literary artist who turned Wendover's chronicle into something flashy and further distanced from the truth.¹⁰³ Warren firmly holds that Paris's description of the delegation is highly problematic. He points out errors unrelated to the delegation story that were committed by Paris throughout the chronicle, and then uses these inaccuracies to discredit Paris in general and the delegation story in particular. The evidence marshalled by Warren enables him to reinforce a sense of Paris's capacity for prevarication: 'He would have us believe that in 1213, when John was hard pressed by enemies both at home and abroad, he sought to gain a protector by offering to make England tributary to the Moslem ruler of North Africa, and to abandon Christianity "which he considered false", and to embrace Islam.'¹⁰⁴ The manner in which Robert of London presented to the caliph John's true character, which is painted pitch black, is in Warren's view an outstanding rhetorical device that projected this image of the king for generations to come. On the one hand, Warren uses every possible expression in order to deny any historical value to the delegation story. He calls it a legend, a tale, and a work of fiction based on gossip. As such, the text, so he claims,

¹⁰² Painter, *The Reign of King John*, pp. 235–36.

¹⁰³ Warren, *King John*, pp. 13–15.

¹⁰⁴ Warren, *King John*, p. 14. Other contemporary historians refer to the delegation affair in contexts rather different than the political situation in which King John was entangled. Turner, *King John*, p. 148 for instance, mentions the delegation story in the context of the criticism laid upon John's piety. Painter, *The Reign of King John*, p. 235, focuses on the criticism upon John's relations with the queen, Isabella of Angoulême, and the many concubines he held.

would interest scholars only as far as understanding what motivated Paris, and those who followed in his footsteps, to tell such fabrications about John. On the other hand, Warren writes that 'Paris, as a born raconteur, fills out his story of the experience of John's envoys with much picturesque detail, so that even so essentially improbable a tale takes on some semblance of authenticity'.¹⁰⁵

In 1960, 1964, and again in 1967, Nevil Barbour devoted ground-breaking essays to Almohad-English-Navarrese relations. In his attempt to reconcile Paris's account with the primary sources for the Almohad intervention in Spain, he writes that reliable Muslim chronicles record the visit of two delegates to the court of the Almohad caliph, and that this documentation stands as perhaps the single external corroboration of the delegation story.¹⁰⁶ This author is unique among historians in that he offered a solution, if only partial, for the problem of the story, particularly in that he accepted at face value John's offer to convert to Islam; not only did he not see this as incredible, he also accepted as a possibility the willingness of the caliph to discuss a political agreement.

Norman Daniel, a scholar of medieval Christian-Muslim relations, took Paris's delegation into serious consideration.¹⁰⁷ In his *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, Daniel puts forth the notion that the delegation story belongs in the genre of polemics. Some medieval Christian writers used this platform to present the merits of 'despised' religions, thus highlighting and criticizing the Christians' own lack of piety. From this, Daniel concludes, the subjugation and conversion constituted well-crafted, albeit vile, fiction.¹⁰⁸

Richard Southern makes reference to Paris's delegation story in his work *Western Society and the Church*. In his introduction to the volume, Southern writes that the medieval church ultimately relied on the secular rulers' acquiescence to its demands. As such, these rulers had developed an attitude over time of indifference to excommunication and ostracism, the only tools available to the pope to impose his will upon them. John, for his part, receives a great deal of sympathy from Southern. He points out that the king ruled under interdict for a very long time, with it barely affecting the fabric of life throughout his kingdom. Southern stresses that John acted in the areas of foreign policy and diplomacy without interruption, even when Innocent III, perhaps the strong-

¹⁰⁵ Warren, *King John*, pp. 14–16. Nicholas Vincent notes that one can learn from it about the rumours spread at the time on the queen; Vincent, 'Isabella of Angoulême', pp. 200–01.

¹⁰⁶ Barbour, 'The Embassy Sent by King John'. See also his 'Two Christian Embassies'.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel, *Islam and the West* (1960), p. 200; (2009), pp. 23, 257.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel, *Islam and the West* (1960), p. 203.

est of medieval monarchic popes, excommunicated him. It is in this context that Southern refers to the troublesome aspects of the delegation story: 'A contemporary chronicler says that the king thought of becoming a Moslem, and he gives a detailed account of the steps he took in this direction.' Southern holds that the story was totally fabricated, writing that John's apparent willingness to convert to Islam was 'probably only one of those wild outbursts which are familiar in any highly integrated system. But there was one thing the king never thought of doing, and that was to cast off the authority of Rome'.¹⁰⁹

Christopher R. Cheney refers to the possibility of English-Almohad negotiations sometime before 1212. In his *Pope Innocent III and England*, he notes several links between Christian and Muslim powers prevalent in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Cheney argues that there is no reason to dismiss the possibility of an English offer of a treaty to the Almohad ruler in southern Spain, Muḥammad al-Nāṣir, as it accords with the conduct of other Christian princes. He too, however, ultimately accepts the traditional reading of Paris's text, writing that 'we must reject [...] a lot of nonsense in the story and John's offer of conversion to Islam'.¹¹⁰

In his biography of John, Ralph Turner addresses the delegation story in a back-handed manner. Turner examines the governmental-diplomatic conduct of the king and the king's relationship with the Church, and points out the problems within Paris's report. The story is offered by Turner as an example of the literary licence taken by the chroniclers of the St Albans school. Turner writes that Paris brought an implausible account of the delegation which was supposedly sent by John to the sultan of Morocco and Spain, where he expressed his willingness to be subjugated and to convert to Islam.¹¹¹

Stephen Church mentions Paris's delegation story in *The Household Knights of King John*, and again in his *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*. In his survey of the diplomatic administration of the king, Church is interested in the technical aspects of John's diplomatic apparatus and brings forth the story to illustrate his point. He writes that the story is the best-known account of a diplomatic delegation on the part of the king, and that 'it provides an interesting insight into the use of knights by kings as diplomats to foreign countries'. Church describes the diplomatic mission mentioned in Paris's chronicle as an authentic and perfectly acceptable account. The delega-

¹⁰⁹ Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, pp. 20–21.

¹¹⁰ Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England*, pp. 14–15.

¹¹¹ Turner, *King John*, p. 148.

tion was comprised of two knights and a monk, a combination which Church claims also appears in other documents with reference to diplomatic missions. In Paris's story, it was Erdington the knight who was quite eloquent and who spoke in favour of John to the caliph, and from this Church concludes that the knights to whom John entrusted this diplomatic mission did not necessarily support their delegation companion, the monk. At times, they were in the foreground of the mission, and the monk was left in the background. Nevertheless, Church dismisses the story, claiming that it never happened, and that it was but a tool of Paris the chronicler to express his hostility toward John. In his view, the story has very little historical value 'and in no way can be taken seriously'.¹¹²

In an article devoted to Isabella of Angoulême, John's second wife and queen of England, Nicholas Vincent examines the quality of current information about the relationship between the king and queen. Paris's comments about the queen and her relationship with John appear as part of a more extensive report of the activities of 'one Robert of London', who was sent on behalf of John to the court of the Moroccan caliph, and that as such he was able to provide a first-hand account of the activities there. According to this report, Robert of London told the caliph of the adulterous queen and her estranged relationship with John. Vincent signals discrepancies in the *Chronica majora* concerning the relationship between John and Queen Isabella.¹¹³ Based on the picture that emerges from research regarding the relationship between Isabella and John and mostly of her marriage, after John's death, to Hugo de Lusignan, and also regarding the co-operation of the two with the Capetians against her son, Henry III, Vincent maintains that Paris's description as portrayed in the delegation story is the closest version we have to the historical reality. However, as for the document on the whole, Vincent contends that 'so fanciful is the entire account in which this story appears, that it has never found acceptance with historians and probably never will'. Vincent writes that John's proposal to

¹¹² Church, *The Household Knights of King John*, p. 66 n. 210; Church, *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*, pp. xxiv–xxv.

¹¹³ Vincent, 'Isabella of Angoulême', pp. 203–04. Vincent refers to the delegation story as a report on the whereabouts of Robert of London. Paris relates King John's political failure, the loss of Normandy to his adultery with the wives and daughters of his barons. The details appear repeatedly almost in all modern biographies, for instance, Turner, *King John*, pp. 180–201. See also Vincent, 'Isabella, suo jure countess of Angoulême (c. 1188–1246)'. Sidney Painter also refers to the embassy story in the context of King John's relations with Queen Isabella and the way Robert of London described these relations; see Painter, *The Reign of King John*, pp. 235–36, and also Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 94–96.

subjugate England and convert to Islam is patently ridiculous and is a parody of his later surrender to the pope.¹¹⁴ In a recently published article, Vincent actually spoke out quite decisively in regard to the contact that may have occurred between John and the Almohads. He rightly wrote that:

The story as it stands is entirely implausible. It nonetheless emerged from real circumstances, from negotiations that almost certainly did take place at around this time between England and the Almohads, concerned not with any apostasy but with King John's attempt to ensure Almohad neutrality in order that he might cement an alliance with the King of Aragon and the count of Toulouse, to open a third front in those hostilities against Philip Augustus of France that remained John's chief and overriding ambition.¹¹⁵

As recently as 2015, Paris's report of the delegation to the Almohads was referred to as 'a very fanciful story'.¹¹⁶ Notably, the delegation story has reassumed prominence in recent political-cultural discourse. This debate may be termed the 'post-9/11 discourse' or the 'rhetoric of a clash of civilizations'. Following the 2008 media report of the archbishop of Canterbury's alleged suggestion to grant Muslim law (*shari'a*), a place within the domestic law in Britain, John resurfaced as a topic of public discussion.¹¹⁷ Newspaper and internet pundits, liberals on the one hand, and conservatives and new extremists on the other, began a debate in which the positions espoused were the opposite of those of professional historians, as described above. In this case, it was the conservative historians who claimed that John had really wanted to subjugate the kingdom and convert to Islam, while liberal historians claimed that John's conduct did not support these conclusions. The ideological dimension of 'culture clash' attained a central place in this discourse, and John and the delegation story served as a basis to expose new anti-Islamic sentiment.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Vincent, 'Isabella of Angoulême', pp. 200–01.

¹¹⁵ Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', p. 253.

¹¹⁶ Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 74.

¹¹⁷ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*; Geaves, *Islam and the West Post 9/11*; Kirk, *Civilisations in Conflict?*, pp. 28–39.

¹¹⁸ Ahdar and Aroney, *Shari'a in the West*, pp. 1–31; Bat Ye'or, *Eurabia*, chap. 6.

HISTORY, AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND THEOLOGY IN THE DELEGATION STORY

History: The Diplomats in the Delegation Story

The fact that Thomas of Erdington and Robert of London were real persons whose identities can be verified by royal records forces historians to investigate their characters and careers. Following up their administrative service and upward mobility might lead us to the closely related swift transitions in John's administration during the years of the papal interdict.

John asserted his right to influence an important appointment, a right that was enshrined in tradition and precedent, and he insisted that at least the man elected should be agreeable to him. This ran counter to the pope's decision to appoint his candidate, Stephen Langton, who was elected against the will of the king by the monks of Christ Church in Canterbury.¹ George Sayles wrote that 'of all medieval conflicts between Church and State, the longest and perhaps most significant was that between John and Innocent III'.² This is perhaps taking things too far, but the controversy over the appointment of the archbishop of Canterbury was indeed firm, and it lasted from 23 March 1208, when the pope imposed a ban on England, until 2 July 1214, when the interdict was finally lifted. Despite the imposition of papal interdict, the administration of the English Church seems to have continued uninterrupted. John succeeded in taking full advantage of the opportunities afforded him by the new situation. Quickly, the king installed his officials over church properties and had them

¹ Holdsworth, 'Langton, Stephen (c. 1150–1228)'; Baldwin, 'Master Stephen Langton, Future Archbishop of Canterbury'.

² Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, p. 394; Bolton, 'Philip Augustus and John'.

confiscated. After seizing the forfeited estates, these officials presided in abbeys, bishoprics, and parishes. As sheriffs, they divided the administrative units of the monasteries, which were called obediences (*obedientia*) to the spheres of authority of the bailiwick (*balliva*), similar to the administrative units responsible for the properties of the king.³ The obedientiary system had emerged in the ninth century, creating far-reaching changes in the nature of monastic communities in England. With time, a large number of residents in the monastic communities became employed in administration, and there were monasteries in which the phenomenon turned into a career for some of the monks. When this system developed rapidly in the late twelfth century and during the thirteenth, the obedientiaries became a sector within the community, and its followers sometimes disengaged from the monastic lifestyle.⁴

With the imposition of the interdict, John placed his appointed officials in charge of the income of the monasteries' abbots and also of minor officials who were under their jurisdiction. He impounded property, forced the owners to pay for the privilege of having it administered by royal clerks, and had them pay fines in order to retrieve their position. John levied single-instance fines on the churches and the monks and demanded 'gifts' of various sums of money that church functionaries could not refuse to supply.⁵ This policy often resulted, if only indirectly, in the repair of the financial management of the Church's and monasteries' assets. Abbot John de Cella (1195–1214) and his successor, William of Trumpington (1214–1235), headed St Albans in the period parallel to John's reign and under the interdict. At this point, the obedientiary system had been operating at full throttle for some time. Some of the monasteries, St Albans among them, suffered from mismanagement, wastefulness, and extravagance. Their assets were scattered and remote, and the lack of efficient methods of collection and payment increased the costs and waste. These disadvantages contributed to fragmented financial management within the monastery: the delegation of responsibility created a dual administrative mechanism which granted control over revenue to a large number of individuals, and prevented centralized management. At St Albans, too, a point came in which the monastery properties were mortgaged by the monks, thus creating havoc.⁶ According

³ For *obedientia*, see Du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et infimae latinitatis*, IV, 2, s.v. *obedientia*. For *balliva*, see *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, p. 175, s.v. *bailliva*.

⁴ Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain*, pp. 172–73.

⁵ Cheney, 'King John and the Papal Interdict', pp. 305–06.

⁶ Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, p. 304. On Paris's account on William of Trumpington, see Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History', p. 267.

to archival evidence, John de Cella was a poor administrator. His extravagant construction projects left the monastery in debt, and he was weak in the area of billing and collections. To the bleak financial situation of the monastery at his time were added the decrees of the Crown on the heels of the papal interdict, that is, the one-time fine of 600 marks in 1208, accompanied by a gift (*dona*) demanded by the king of 500 marks. During the interdict, using the power of royal law, John withheld almost all ecclesiastical appointments. He created a proliferation of unmanned vacancies which enabled him to retain the vacancy revenues until a successor was appointed. Although John took advantage of the interdict to fill the treasury of the Crown, which Richard had left almost empty, he did not take full rein from the bishops in the churches and from the abbots in the monasteries.⁷ John wished to be seen by his barons as someone who was struggling with the pope in Rome rather than as engaged in a power struggle with the English Church and its officials, many of whom were his own barons. Thus, he made a point of returning as quickly as possible to their positions the abbots and other church functionaries. Those who remained without a position were generally among those who had left the kingdom with the imposition of the interdict.

While he and his kingdom were under papal interdict, John succeeded in routing the supporting actors in the political-social arena in a manner in which they would best serve the Crown; he did so by cleverly manoeuvring these players against each other. John maintained an on-going, if open-ended, relationship with Rome, until such time as he saw fit to bring the conflict to an end. The king reinstated, after a brief period, many church functionaries to their posts, including some barons, and he initiated negotiations with the pope immediately upon the outbreak of the dispute. Indeed, emissaries shuttled between England and Rome on a regular basis. This reassured the barons, who saw the king as actively addressing the crisis. Of course, negotiations did fluctuate: at times, they were more frequent, and at other times, less. The degree to which they were publicized varied as well. However, from August 1211, whence John was presented with the demands of the pope through his legates in Northampton until November 1212, by which time John sent a large delegation to Rome empowered to agree to those demands, the English king withheld all contact between the parties.

Throughout, John organized his bureaucracy through a system of appointed officials that acted on his behalf. These were unpopular with the barons, as they

⁷ Brundage, 'The Managerial Revolution in the English Church'.

represented a model of 'civil servant', like those who John had promoted, as professional administrators who were paid by the Crown and were not part of the baronial feudal system.⁸ John often used these officials both as supervisors and custodians of church property and the property of the monasteries during the years of the interdict, not infrequently alongside the reinstated ecclesiastic position-holder. The king also appointed these bureaucrats to function on his behalf in diplomatic missions, and sometimes made them the head of the delegations. To a great extent, these diplomats were responsible for the success or failure of the missions. The kings, like the popes, exchanged official letters; however, it was the ability of diplomats to persuade, to broker an offer, and to speak on behalf of the king who sent them that concluded a successful mission or caused negotiations to fail. The king also entrusted his diplomats with a considerable degree of authority regarding negotiations, due to the absence of facilities for immediate consultation, and the diplomats in fact spoke in the name of the king. Thus, the king would carefully consider both the purpose of the mission and the role of each diplomat when choosing officials to be members of diplomatic delegations. In addition to these officials, John granted authority to other, ancillary figures, such as those in the military orders. For example, John entrusted his treasures to the Templars.⁹ He created a system of 'cash caches' in the provinces for his treasury; since he was in constant transit, it was difficult to move his money along with him, especially that which was not needed for immediate use. Thus, he deposited funds with his servants, the secular appointed officials in what evolved as 'area treasuries'. The latter kept the revenues in castles throughout the kingdom and were made accountable for the treasury. However, this move only temporarily blunted the hostility of the Templars towards John. The king had taken property from the Templars that had been under their jurisdiction during the days of Richard's absence, and even though it had been returned to the Order with his rise to power, it appears that hard feelings between the Templars and the Angevins endured during John's reign. The Templars had not forgotten the involvement of the Angevins in Richard's transfer of Cyprus to Guy de Lusignan after he sold the island first to the Order en route to the Holy Land. Furthermore, immediately after the imposition of the papal interdict, John took over ownership of the

⁸ Turner, *Men Raised from the Dust*, pp. 1–19; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 227–35.

⁹ Just prior to ascending the throne, John stated that all holders of fiefs of the Crown were required to deposit guarantee money in the treasury held by the Templars. See Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 330. See also, Nicholson, *The Knights Templar*.

assets of all the orders in the kingdom, and in contrast to those of the Order of the Hospitallers, which he returned to their owners a short while later, the assets of the Templars were transferred to the king's secular officials. During the interdict, the bishops of England upheld the papal order preventing privileges to the military orders. The Templars, self-governing since their admittance into England in 1128, had difficulty accepting both the papal intervention in their affairs and the practical co-operation provided by John to the pope. The cities functioned as additional and valuable secondary players. The legal status of the London Commune, as the model for other cities in the kingdom, was a turning point for the Crown with respect to the management of the whole kingdom during John's reign, and the king saw to its endurance throughout the crisis. Most of the privileges had been granted during the early part of John's reign, and since no major change had occurred during the years of the interdict, the civil council did not oppose the king while he struggled with the pope.¹⁰

In November 1212, after a full year and three months of severance of communication between the parties, John, of his own volition, sent a delegation to Rome in order to resume talks. His emissaries were authorized to accept the pope's conditions, in which no changes had been made since August 1211. John was required to submit to the discipline of the Church, and to accept Archbishop Stephen Langton as well as the clergy who had left voluntarily and those who had been exiled from the kingdom. He was also obliged to return all church property he had taken and to make full monetary restitution. While, as noted, his conditions remained consistent, the tenor of Innocent's communications changed during the later years of the interdict. By November 1209, he had excommunicated John. Historians differ concerning the possibility that at a certain point during winter 1212–13, the pope's stance became even more extreme, and he hinted that John might be imminently deposed.¹¹ In the spring and summer months of 1212, John still acted, as he had done throughout the years of the interdict, in support of the barons. It is possible, however, that the deterioration of the pope's policy towards John and the threat to remove him, even if not carried out, influenced the barons' attitude towards the king. At Nottingham on 16 August 1212, John learned of a baronial plot to murder him, hatched by two of his barons, Eustace de Vesci and Robert fitzWalter.¹² In

¹⁰ Brooke, *London, 800–1216*, pp. 45–56.

¹¹ Cheney, 'The Alleged Deposition of King John'; Holdsworth, 'Langton, Stephen (c. 1150–1228)'. See also Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 275–78.

¹² Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 343. On Eustace de Vesci, see Turner,

any event, the papal threat came to light only in the autumn of 1212. At that time, the dissatisfaction of the barons who did not support John's intentions to do battle with Philip Augustus over the continental fiefs was reflected in a revolt. The baronial action took place, as did the threat of overthrow incited by the pope, in the winter of 1212. These events thus belong to another period, with completely different political-governmental circumstances than those in which John had ruled just a few months earlier in the summer of the same year.

Thomas of Erdington

In November of 1212, John sent a delegation to Rome to accept the conditions that were set by Innocent to end the dispute; that is, the conditions that the papal legates Pandulf and Durand had already offered him in Northampton in August 1211.¹³ However, on 27 February 1213, John received a letter from Innocent to the effect that three of John's messengers were missing, and that the pope would not sign an agreement in their absence. The name Thomas of Erdington — who, it will be recalled, was one of the diplomats, and it seems the head diplomat, in the delegation story — appears on the list of the missing three delegates.¹⁴

As it turns out, three of the six members of John's diplomatic mission were abducted en route to Rome between November 1212 and February 1213. The precise date and location of the abduction is unknown. The abduction of Thomas of Erdington, Philip of Worcester, and Richard de Triniton was documented in the royal records. On one of the certificates signed by John, it is stated that on 9 March 1213, the king confirmed the transfer of sums to the Templar and the Hospitaller orders, in the amount of 500 pounds for each one, ransom for the release of the three listed by name.¹⁵ One of three, Philip of Worcester, was a knight who served in John's administration. We know nothing of the other duties he performed other than this delegation to the pope during late 1212, but there is reason to believe that he held some official posi-

'Vescy, Eustace de (1169/70–1216)'. On Robert fitzWalter, see Strickland, 'Fitzwalter, Robert (d. 1235)'; Hallam, *The Plantagenet Chronicles*, p. 263.

¹³ *Annales Monasterii de Waverleia*, ed. by Luard, II, 268–71; Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England*, pp. 329–30.

¹⁴ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 126.

¹⁵ *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III*, ed. by Cheney and Semple, p. 131; *Documents Illustrative of English History*, ed. by Cole, p. 256.

tion in the Benedictine convent in Worcester during the interdict when the bishop of the diocese and many other church functionaries left England.¹⁶ The second man, Richard de Triniton, was also a royal official. He had the vicarage of Brailes as a gift from the king since 1208 and had been a diplomat in John's delegations to Rome since 1210. The remaining three diplomats, Brother Alan Martel, Brother William of St Ouen, and Hugh, abbot of Beaulieu, reached their destination without incident.

The first, Brother Alan Martel, was a Templar monk who had served in many missions on John's behalf. He later appears in the royal documentation as the head of the English Templar order. Brother William of St Ouen was a monk of the Hospitaller order, and he, too, had served in missions on behalf of John to Langton, the exiled archbishop of Canterbury, and to the other bishops exiled during the interdict. Brother William took part in committees connected with the compensation of the church that were conducted in 1214.¹⁷ Hugo was the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Beaulieu in Hampshire, the sole monastery founded at John's initiative. He headed the monastery from its founding in 1203 until his appointment as bishop of Carlisle in 1219.¹⁸ Hugo was one of the church functionaries closest to the king and was sent as an experienced diplomat with almost every delegation that had gone to Rome. He had participated in both the public and the covert negotiations that were conducted between John and Innocent from the outbreak of the crisis until its end.

The abduction of Thomas of Erdington was an event of great significance in the context of John's new administrative system, and within this affair we may glimpse the advanced steps that the king took so as to create this system. Thomas, whose last name appears in Paris's chronicle with an *H*, as 'Thomas de Herdintona', has been identified by scholars as Thomas of Erdington. Stubbs refers to Innocent III's epistle in which the place name appears as 'Erdinton'.¹⁹ Christopher Cheney leaves off the Latin *de* in his translation of the man's name.²⁰

¹⁶ Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, p. 159.

¹⁷ *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III*, ed. by Cheney and Semple, pp. 130–31, 136, 172–73.

¹⁸ Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, p. 659; Knowles, Brooke, and London, *The Heads of Religious Houses*, I, 126, 270; Summerson, 'Hugh (d. 1223)'.

¹⁹ *Memoriale Fratris Walteri de Coventria*, ed. by Stubbs, preface, p. xiii n. 1. See Stubbs's references to archive records regarding Thomas of Erdington: *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 126.

²⁰ *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III*, ed. by Cheney and Semple, letter 45 addressed to King John (27 February 1213), pp. 130–36.

Sidney Painter calls him 'de Eardington', and in the royal archives he sometimes even appears as 'Thomas de Ardinton'.²¹

Thomas of Erdington was a clerk of the king, a person on whom John could rely as a diplomat. Thomas was a bureaucrat who served in the royal administration and was among those closest to John, whom the king referred to as 'dilectus et fidelis noster'.²² Thomas began his duties in 1198 as a knight and then became a sub-sheriff of the chief justiciar, Geoffrey fitzPeter, in Staffordshire.²³ In 1205 Thomas became sheriff in charge of Staffordshire and Shropshire, a position he held until 1216. Thomas was the type of bureaucrat that John recruited in order to limit the baron's powers. He bought at great expense the position with jurisdiction over the baronies that John offered for sale, and in doing so committed himself to complete loyalty to the king and to the interests of the Crown.²⁴ Thomas served as a bailiff for more than a decade and was appointed to a variety of tasks on behalf of the king, from transport of wine to custody over castles and church assets.²⁵ During the years of the interdict, Thomas served as a diplomat to the pope on John's behalf, and he participated in no fewer than five delegations to Rome.²⁶ After the crisis officially ended in the summer of 1214, he also sat on committees that dealt with the king's debt repayment.²⁷ Thomas worked alongside Geoffrey fitzPeter, who, along with Hubert Walter, was a student of Ranulf de Glanvill, Henry II's chief justiciar. The two were second-generation professional judges and administrators from the court of Henry II, who left their mark on the development of English legis-

²¹ Painter, *The Reign of King John*, p. 122. For 'Ardinton', see *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 'Index nominum', p. 684.

²² *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 170.

²³ Geoffrey fitzPeter, earl of Essex, also 'rose from obscure birth to the highest office in the kingdom'; see Turner, *Men Raised from the Dust*, pp. 35–70.

²⁴ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 16b; Verger, 'Les Serviteurs de l'État', pp. 391–95. See also Church, *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*, p. 140.

²⁵ Warren, *King John*, pp. 182–86. Thomas of Erdington is recorded to have purchased the barony of FitzAlan for quite a fortune. As sheriff of Shropshire, he levied royal taxes from the count of Briouze. On the nature and scope of his duties, see *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 16b; 19; 51; 58b; 78; 85; 107; 119; 125; 140b; 171; 184; 199; 244.

²⁶ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 126, 202; Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England*, pp. 36–37, n. 52, and pp. 323, 329.

²⁷ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 168b, 272b; Painter, *The Reign of King John*, pp. 122, 168–69, 189, 197, 221, 304; *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III*, ed. by Cheney and Semple, p. 130; Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England*, p. 352.

lation. Their initiatives in matters of taxation strongly impacted on the consolidation of the power of the state in the hands of the Crown.²⁸

Although masters of both monastic orders received ransom money in exchange for the abductees, the historical background and the immediate circumstances support the hypothesis that it was the order of the Templars that was responsible for the kidnapping. It is not known if this occurred on English soil or when the delegation had already made its way onto the continent. It is safe to assume that no one dared to kidnap the Cistercian abbot, despite the fact that they were white monks, close allies of John. It is also likely that the Templars had no interest in crossing the Hospitallers.²⁹ It seems that the Templars had kidnapped the diplomats who posed relatively little risk of complication and whose abduction best advanced their interests.

John's court included barons of the Hospitaller and the Templar orders. The king had appointed, as previously mentioned, the knights of the Templar order as guardians of the treasury, and he had entrusted to the two friar knights in his delegation to Rome the authority to sign an agreement with the pope. However, it seems that once John decided to accept the pope's terms, these barons sought to prevent the agreement. This may have occurred partly due to the intervention of the Roman Curia in their freedoms and rights, which were harmed in an unprecedented manner during the years of interdict. They realized that by assisting the king in achieving autonomy from the pope, they furthered their own autonomy from the latter. Moreover, the Templars had a personal grievance against Thomas of Erdington. This king's clerk, appointed by Geoffrey fitzPeter, was responsible during the interdict for the supervision of all Templar property in England, and thus he had engaged their hostility.³⁰ Alternatively, the Templars may have executed an abduction that was engineered by France. They permitted only their representatives to meet with the pope in order to avoid, at almost any cost, a papal alliance with the English. Such an alliance was clearly designed to protect England from the aggression of Philip Augustus, who stood at the ready. Finally, there may have been other reasons than those already enumerated. The Templars were well aware of their status as the 'guardians of the treasury' during those critical months in the winter of 1212–13, and

²⁸ Turner, *The English Judiciary in the Age of Glanvill and Bracton*; Barrow, *Feudal Britain*, pp. 192–96. On Geoffrey fitzPeter, see West, 'Geoffrey fitz Peter, fourth earl of Essex (d. 1213)'.

²⁹ Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, pp. 303, 349–63; Cheney, 'King John and the Papal Interdict', p. 313.

³⁰ Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, p. 329.

they worked as a pressure group with a vested interest to secure the best agreement under the given conditions. Indeed, it may be that they simply found an opportunity to extort money from the king.

The manner in which the pope responded to the abduction is particularly telling, and it should be regarded as an instance of John's precedential dealing with the papacy. The pope understood, as did the Templar knights, that negotiations were pointless in Erdington's absence. This was true irrespective of his expertise in any specific field about which the negotiations were conducted. Innocent followed this state of affairs carefully. After six years of almost complete disconnection, he was concerned that religion in England had become stultified, and he was interested in a rapid conclusion of the crisis. The disabling of religious activity in England had resulted over time in a real endangering of faith among the people, plain and simple. Further, the initial response among the different social strata in England to the interdict was a general acceptance of a situation which was perceived to be difficult, but not impossible. From the manner in which John was able to manage the crisis, Innocent understood that before his eyes the seeds of an independent English 'national' Church may have been sown.³¹

John received the terms in November 1212, at which point Innocent saw no reason to delay further, and was prepared to help his former opponent. Indeed, John immediately won the staunch support of the papacy against his enemies.³² The pope's reaction to the disappearance of the three messengers reflected the delicacy with which he dealt with John. Had Innocent signed the document in the presence of the diplomats who arrived, that is, the representatives of the church, he might have been viewed as reverting to his position of June 1207, when he unilaterally appointed Langton as archbishop of Canterbury. The pope had no wish to sign the document in the absence of the representatives of the king, among them Thomas of Erdington: 'Since only three of the messengers came before us, they without the others are without authority to reach an agreement in the spirit of your letter.'³³ Though it is likely that he had heard about the abduction of the members of the delegation, Innocent would not have been at liberty to openly discuss the incident. He did not wish to accuse the military orders of the kidnapping, and he did not want to lodge an accusation against Philip Augustus, with whom he also had a strained relationship.

³¹ Cheney, 'King John's Reaction to the Interdict on England'.

³² On the terms presented to King John by the papal nuncios in Northampton, on 29 or 30 August 1211, see Cheney, 'The Alleged Deposition of King John', pp. 102–03.

³³ *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III*, ed. by Cheney and Semple, p. 131.

We can better understand the exchanges between Erdington and the Muslim caliph in light of the information we have about this important civil servant. So too we see that these passages point to the irrelevancy of the notions of religious conversion, subjugation of fiefs, or failure of negotiations. The sense of Erdington's character that we have from background information such as the kidnapping incident serves to cast further doubt on a conventional reading of the story and makes it extremely difficult for historians to properly evaluate it. They are forever wedded to the above-mentioned paradox, particularly in light of the fact that Paris the chronicler forces them, if only by dint of the appointment of Erdington as the head of the delegation, to follow up on his character and career. We shall see that rereading the story is the only way around the paradox. We now turn to Robert of London.

Robert of London

Robert of London was a royal clerk, one of the expert tax collectors in John's administration during the years 1203–14. Although no direct connection between him and Thomas of Erdington is recorded in royal documentation, it is nevertheless highly probable that the two knew each other prior to their joint mission as diplomats to the Almohad court. Robert and Thomas appear in reference and in the context of the same 'new men' in John's administration whose promotion often disturbed local élites: Richard of Marisco, Reginald of Cornhill, Robert Basset, and Robert of Vieuxpont, to name but a few.³⁴

Apart from the appointment he received from John as royal custodian of St Albans — that is, the appointment to which Paris refers in the delegation story and that caught the attention of the Victorian historians due to the fact that it was registered in the royal records — Robert of London is noted quite a few times as a royal official in these records. I now introduce in detail, towards the goal of confirming the person and character of Robert that appears in Paris's delegation story, the relevant documentation found in John's royal archives. By means of this documentation, I seek to strengthen the identification of this man that was held by William Stubbs and Christopher Cheney.³⁵

³⁴ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 121. With reference to St Albans monastery, see p. 132. On Richard de Marisco, see Stacey, 'Marsh, Richard (d. 1226)'.

³⁵ There were other persons carrying the name Robert of London in the royal service. Alice Taylor identifies one as Robert of London the cook and argues that he was the one mentioned in Paris's delegation story; Taylor, 'Robert de Londres, Illegitimate Son of William, King of Scots'. Taylor refers to the Charter Rolls; see *Rot. Chart.*, I, 62b: 'London, Robertus de, filius Gervasii'. See also on this *The Great Roll of the Pipe*, ed. by Kirkus, p. 203, and *Rot. Litt. Claus.*,

An exhaustive examination of the documentation on Robert of London might make for a fascinating study; however, even a partial inquiry into the administrative archives allows us to track the movements of the royal clerk and gives us an indication of the breadth of his activity.

Robert of London's name is first mentioned in a royal public direction from January 1203, which was written on behalf of John to the bishop of Chichester in southeast England.³⁶ Robert is not yet named at this instance as a 'royal clerk' (*clericus Regis*), a term he is referred to in documents that will appear later. However, he received a pension in the local church an extension of the monastery, presumably Augustinian, in Hastings. The church in Hastings (Sussex), from which he was supposed to receive his income based on the king's warrant in the above-mentioned document, may be identified with the Church of the Holy Trinity monastery of the Augustinian monks, which was established in 1199.³⁷ This makes it highly likely that Robert himself was an Augustinian monk.

The next time Robert of London's name appears is in a royal document dated 1206. In this year Robert of London is mentioned three times, and in all three instances the title 'king's clerk' is appended to his name. The records from January and from March of 1206 pertain to the property of Hubert Walter, who served as the archbishop of Canterbury and chancellor from John's coronation until Walter's death on 13 July 1205. Hubert Walter was one of the powerful people in the Angevin court. In fact, he held, from Richard's reign between 1194 and 1198, the position of chief justiciar until the pope forced him to give up his administrative role in the king's service and remain a single Lord's servant. In the first document, from January 1206, the king instructs everyone to keep the safety of Brother Geoffrey and Robert of London, his clerks in Tewkesbury,³⁸ after he received property from them that belonged to

I, 93; 128; 182b. I think there is a clear difference between the two persons even apart from the nature of their function, and that is the manner in which the king addressed Robert of London, as 'our clerk'. This title does not appear when he referred to the cook.

³⁶ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 22b. On an earlier appearance of one, Robert of London, from 1199 who cannot be identified with certainty as the king's clerk, see *Rot. de Ob.*, ed. by Hardy, 40. Robert appears for instance in PR 9 John 30: 'Et Roberto cleric de Lond' x m. per breve G. f. Petri'. See *The Great Roll of the Pipe*, ed. by Kirkus.

³⁷ Knowles, *The Heads of Religious Houses*, I, 165; Warren, *King John*, p. 155: 'for the king who needed administrative officials in large numbers, there was a great advantage in employing clergymen for the cost of maintaining them could be reduced by giving them a parish church.'

³⁸ Tewkesbury/Teukesbury, in Gloucestershire. See Knowles, Brooke, and London, *The Heads of Religious Houses*, I, 73. See Stacey, 'Walter, Hubert (d. 1205)'.

Hubert, the former archbishop of Canterbury, which the king deposited with the master and brothers of the Templar Order in London.³⁹ In the second document, dated March 1206, John commands Richard of Bello Campo and Milo of Bello Campo that if Robert of Vieuxpont will be found,⁴⁰ he should be told that the king instructs him to send the cape, which was Hubert Walters'. These men were instructed to pass it on to Robert of London, 'our official and in the hands of Robert Basset, our law operators on our behalf'.⁴¹

According to these two records, Robert of London was meant to have received on behalf of the king, along with another official, the belongings of Hubert Walter from the people who had them in their possession, and to transfer them safely to the king. The property in question included gemstones, jewellery, and other valuables that belonged to the archbishop of Canterbury, perhaps the highest-ranking clerk and wealthiest person in the king's court. John had charged Robert of London with a sensitive and complicated task, which also involved no small risk for the personal safety of the clerk. It is reasonable to assume that the king would not have charged the delivery of such valuable assets with strong symbolic importance to low-level bureaucrats but, rather, to those with a high status; individuals who in his eyes were loyal, forceful, and capable of both taking upon themselves and performing a highly delicate task. As mentioned above, the Templars were an order of warrior monks to whose members John entrusted his treasures; however, the documents that mention Robert of London support the notion that he and other officials also had access to the royal treasure.⁴² In the third document from 1206, this time from May of that year, the king turned to the Lincoln bishopric with instructions regarding supervision over its property deposited by one of his clerks. The king granted Robert of London exclusive supervision over one of the castles and all that is related to it.⁴³ This is the first document in which Robert of London is men-

³⁹ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 58b.

⁴⁰ Robert of Vipont/Vieuxpont (a castle in Rouen, Normandy) was in charge of the king's northern deposit at Nottingham. See Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 337. On Vieuxpont, see Summerson, 'Vieuxpont, Robert de (d. 1228)'.

⁴¹ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 60–60b. 'Mortalac' is apparently Mortlach, one of the bishopric seats in Scotland subjugated to Aberdeen. It is the historic name of Dufftown in Banffshire. The bishops of the town at that time were John of Kelso between 1199 and 1207, followed by Adam de Kald between 1207 and 1228.

⁴² Jolliffe, 'The Chamber and the Castle Treasuries under King John'.

⁴³ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 65. I assumed this letter dates to the month of May, since it appears in the Index between two letters which are dated May.

tioned as someone with administrative authority for overseeing (*custodia*) on behalf of the king. In medieval English texts, the word *custodia* denotes having jurisdiction in the administration or in the royal household, guarding or overseeing part of the castle, fort or monastery.⁴⁴ The custodian or overseer appears, among the rest, as holder of the role of property and judicial registrar. This is, then, the authority of a clerk who is a professional bureaucrat in charge of the control of revenues, mainly of taxes.⁴⁵ Robert of London, according to this documentation, held, presumably four years after entering the service of the king, much more than the modest income of a man of the church, with which he began in Hastings. The said document, from May 1206, regulates the powers of particular interest of a certain official, and Robert of London is mentioned in it casually, as it turns out that he himself held the castle and all the property belonging to it. At this point it seems that Robert of London was not a monk that lives on an allowance but, rather, was an upstanding, privileged clerk in the service of the king.

While the interdict was officially imposed only at the end of March 1208, tensions between John and Innocent had increased from 27 August 1207, when the pope ordered the bishops in England, in aggressive tones, to impose a ban on England if John did not immediately accept the appointment of Stephen Langton to archbishop of Canterbury. From the letters sent by the king to the various dioceses in England, beginning mid-March 1208, it seems that John went ahead and announced that he was transferring to the royal officials all the land and property of the abbots, priests, and church leaders of the dioceses who obeyed the pope and stopped the on-going course of religious life. Royal officials were instructed to take possession, in the name of the king, of all land, property, and goods of church functionaries, and leave those with official appointments allowances for subsistence only.⁴⁶ In a royal act dated 4 January 1207 that was directed privately to his officials, Reginald of Cornhill and Fulk de Cantilupe, King John informed the two that he had sent them his clerk, Robert of London, in whose hands they are required to deposit a certain

⁴⁴ *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, pp. 543–44, s.v. *custodia*: ‘keeping, keepership of office or jurisdiction in national administration or royal household: (of records, of the peace, of seal); service of watch and ward (or payment in lieu); ward (division of castle); Division of monastery.’

⁴⁵ On the novelty of this group of officials in John’s administration, see Painter, *The Reign of King John*, p. 122.

⁴⁶ Cheney, ‘King John’s Reaction to the Interdict on England’, p. 130.

amount of wheat.⁴⁷ On 22 January, the king informed his barons of a mission he assigned to his clerk, Robert of London, which had to do with valuables belonging to the king.⁴⁸ However, on 29 March, John seems to have appointed Robert to a different task, connected with the increasing papal threats of interdict. Robert of London was now charged by the king to oversee the priory of Ruislip (Middlesex), with all that pertained to it.⁴⁹

In 1208, Robert of London's activities expanded considerably, and when the interdict went into effect, Robert began to appear at the centre stage of John's moves to exploit the resources of the Church. It is possible to follow the moves of the king's clerk before 23 March 1208, the day the papal interdict officially came into effect over England. Already on 21 January Robert received, along with another of the king's clerks, Henry of Sandwich, who is mentioned alongside him in several other documents, the role appointed to them by the king to be custodians of the properties of the Holy Trinity monastery at Canterbury. Two days later, on 23 January, the king announced in writing that Robert of London, along with other clerks of his choosing, had received the appointment of Christ Church in Canterbury and of the properties of that archbishopric. The document from 21 January 1208 reads as follows:

Robert of London the clerk and Henry of Sandwich have complete authority over the Holy Trinity monastery in Canterbury, and over all the things that belong to it. And will be held for as long as the King wants it so. Wherefrom they have a public letter of the Lord King directed to all, about these said things in clarity, so that [the people] will now help them as overseers.⁵⁰

The public letter from 23 January 1208 addressed to Fulk de Cantilupe and to Reginald of Cornhill contains the appointment of Master Ralph of St Martin and Robert of London as custodians of the church of the archbishop of Canterbury, along with all that previously belonged to that church.⁵¹ The king

⁴⁷ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 100. On Reginald of Cornhill, see Harvey, 'Reginald of Cornhill'.

⁴⁸ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 103.

⁴⁹ *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, I, 108. See Knowles, Brooke, and London, *The Heads of Religious Houses*, I, 107; II, 188.

⁵⁰ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 78b.

⁵¹ On Cantilupe and on William de Cantilupe as the king's administrator who received lands from the king and served him till his death, see Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire*, II, pt 2, p. 79. See also Holden, 'Cantilupe [Cantelupe], William (I) de' and 'Cantilupe [Cantelupe], Fulk, de'. Reginald of Cornhill was in charge of King John's deposit at Rochester; see Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 337.

appointed the same Robert and Henry of Sandwich as custodians of all visible objects in the monastery of the same church, and all that was related to it. He also ordered these same people, Master Ralph and Robert and Ralph of Arden, to be custodians of all visible objects at the archbishopric of Canterbury, and all that belong to it, for as long as it pleased him.⁵²

John promoted Robert of London and made him one of the secular clerks in charge of no less than the archbishopric of Canterbury. The archbishopric was well endowed, owned multiple properties, and was very complex in terms of ecclesiastical bodies subordinate to it. Further, the archbishop of Canterbury was, administratively and symbolically, the head of hierarchy of the English ecclesiastic order. Most importantly, the archbishopric was situated at the heart of the conflict between John and the pope and his supporters in England. Robert received, then, the appointment of Canterbury Cathedral, Christ Church, precisely the place where the crisis began due to severe rivalries among the monks, the priests, and the archbishop. Five days after the interdict was imposed on 29 March 1208, Robert of London appeared in a royal certificate alongside another person, Matthew Mantell, as the secular superiors at the St Albans monastery.⁵³ Seen from the perspective of the royal documentation of Robert's professional path, this is not an unusual action to have been taken by the king, as two months earlier Robert had been appointed, as mentioned above, as one of the custodians to the archbishopric of Canterbury. Robert of London was to prove his skills as a mediator and his ability to monitor, alongside the other officials of so many of the church properties and assets on behalf of the king, to collect that which was due the king from those properties. Robert of London became the king's man, 'the chosen of the king' (*nostro dilecto*), as other high rank royal servants were addressed, in St Albans as well, an important and influential centre of English ecclesiastic and royal politics.

Robert of London appears for a fourth time in a royal public letter of October 1208, a year in which the clerk apparently worked diligently for the king under a massive work load. This is probably the ratification of the appointment of Robert and of that of Henry of Sandwich and other officials as royal agents in the archbishopric of Canterbury. The publication of another certificate, identical to the previous ones in content and timeframe, might indicate the difficulties in enforcing the order. We might be looking at evidence of Robert

⁵² *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 79. Richard de Marisco, who is recalled in this document, was chief councillor of King John; see *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. by Riley, I, 242–43.

⁵³ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 81b.

of London's activities and the not-insignificant difficulties he had in enforcement, which may well have made him the target of opposition and rage.⁵⁴ In the year 1209, Robert of London appears in a letter dated 3 July, meant for the archdeacon of Oxenbourne (Hampshire). The king stayed in Lincoln and announced to that same archdeacon that he gave Robert custody over church assets. Like many of the other vacancies left without staffing during the interdict, the church of the Kenilworth monastery was transferred to the auspices of the king. John demanded that his representative Robert of London be accepted without delay and without encountering difficulties.⁵⁵ The last time Robert of London is mentioned in the royal letters is in a document dated 23 June 1214, in which John transfers the Chichester church, which was under the supervision of Robert of London, and in which there was an open position.⁵⁶

Archival evidence points to the king's clerk named Robert of London being the same figure that appears in Paris's delegation story. This data both supports my view that the story reveals specific truths about John, and my alternative reading. Robert of London, already in the years before the interdict, was a king's clerk, a monk who succeeds profoundly in John's service, and one in whose administrative skills the king had great confidence. John intended to appoint as 'treasurer' and 'custodian of assets' someone with the ability to manage many registers and who was meticulous in accounting, financial management, and the transfer of valuable property; however, beyond this, it seems that John discovered in Robert of London a forceful and authoritative person whose word had value and carried weight. Further, he found in him a man of excellent mediation skills, which were critical for the position he held. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand how the king entrusted the realm's most important position to Robert as a professional steward during such a period of his reign, before and, in particular, during the interdict. Robert of London appears among servants of the first rank in the royal administration. His name was listed alongside key figures such as Robert of Vieuxpont and Reginald of Cornhill, in whose hands King John had also deposited his retinue.

If the Robert of London who appears in the delegation story is the same Robert of London found in the royal records, we now know even more about the character of the former. It was Robert, even more than John, who was the key figure in the delegation story. First and foremost, Robert of London, like

⁵⁴ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 76b.

⁵⁵ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 84; Knowles, Brooke, and London, *The Heads of Religious Houses*, II, 398.

⁵⁶ *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, I, 117b.

Thomas of Erdington as Paris describes him, is drawn in exact accordance with the historical background pertaining to John's struggles with the barons and the church. Paris recounts Robert of London as a clerk appointed on behalf of the king over the St Albans monastery, and he is precise about the smallest of details regarding his role in the convent: first as the replacement for the incumbent abbot, and afterwards as the holder of, as it seems, all the properties of the monastery which were not subject to the obedientiary system — that is, to John de Cella, the reinstated abbot. This was John's way of avoiding tangling up his civil servants in long-term administration of church lands and benefices, while still retaining revenues from the original seizures. In the story, Robert's talents, techniques, and extraordinarily successful mediation between the monastery and the king are fully brought to light. He acquired, it is related, all that the king was granted by law. His conduct reflects the way by which the king could rule his agents and subjects with absolute, and novel, precision. In each unit of *obedientia*, Paris writes, Robert appointed the largest attainable number of 'gatekeepers' as precision-oriented evaluators of real estate related or portable property, and through them he extracted from the monastery the revenue of over 1000 marks.⁵⁷ Robert appointed on his own behalf a guard and a monk to take charge of the wine and groceries (*cellarer*).⁵⁸ This, too, we know from independent historical evidence available on John's administration, as in David Carpenter's remark that 'in the localities a set of aggressive royal agents became entrenched in office'.⁵⁹

Abbot John de Cella was reinstated to his position in St Albans; however, the precise date of his return is unknown, and it is more than likely that Paris's text refers to the revenues of the monastery being kept under Robert's control, but it is not clear whether or not the text implies the waiver of all the revenues. In the appointment document from 29 March, John wrote that Robert was appointed as custodian of all the property of the abbot and all who answer to him. Robert was appointed by the king as a clerk during the time that John de Cella held this position, which may indicate the date of appointment in 1208. But it could also relate to the period in which the position was returned to John de Cella, after which he reaccepted the legal holding over the monastery's properties, while Robert of London was still in his official position as the king's

⁵⁷ Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, pp. 284–87; Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, pp. 276, 431–39.

⁵⁸ *Ch. maj.*, II, 564; Cheney, 'King John and the Papal Interdict', p. 305 n. 4.

⁵⁹ Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, p. 274.

clerk and representative in the monastery.⁶⁰ The phrasing of the text in the delegation story can be helpful in this regard, as John de Cella is described as the 'temporary' abbot of the monastery (*qui pro tempore fuit*).⁶¹

The obedientiary system to which Paris refers in the delegation story would have very likely resulted in both the position and the income of John de Cella being reinstated a relatively short time after they had been taken from him. If this were so, there is reason to assume that John left Robert of London as the secular official in charge, a position on behalf of the king, over the monastery, alongside John de Cella, and that Robert held this position for some time. If this were the case, all the sources of the monastery's income that were not in the abbot's possession were transferred to and remained in the hands of this figure. Most likely, the sources of income that were needed to maintain the monastery and its residents were transferred to those who held the positions, and the rest was transferred to the treasury of the king. The delegation story documents the extraordinary efficiency with which Robert extracted from each local guardian of the monastery properties and its assets the greatest profit for the king. Paris's credible description of Robert's activities in St Albans inclines us towards accepting his description of Robert's diplomatic activity. Further, this suggests that Paris placed Robert appropriately in the composition of the delegation. After the official conversation that took place between the caliph and Erdington, the professional diplomat, then the caliph and Robert, the professional tax collector, turned to discuss the details of the implementation of the agreement. Certainly there is a close correlation between the activities and areas of expertise of the monk-clerk as revealed by the records in the service of the king, and those in the story. The documentation in the royal archives confirms Robert of London in the delegation story as an actual diplomat designated as an official during the delegation to the caliph of Morocco. Remarkable congruence appears between his activities and areas of expertise and his designated role in the delegation.

The previously mentioned documents cover more than a decade in the life of Robert of London. They disclose a great deal about the elevated status

⁶⁰ Cheney, 'King John's Reaction to the Interdict on England', p. 136 n. 2.

⁶¹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 564: 'Ipse igitur Robertus, inconsulto, immo potius invito, abbate qui pro tempore fuit, videlicet Johanne de Cella, viro religiosissimo et literatissimo, omnia quae in ecclesia et curia fuerunt pro libitu dirupit et sibi appropriavit' ('This Robert then, without consulting, and even more, against the will of the temporary abbot, John de Cella, a most religious and most learned man, seized at pleasure everything which was then in the church and the convent and appropriated it to himself').

enjoyed by the clerk in the king's service. He was tasked with financial management and tax collection, and his expert performance in these areas led to considerable gain for the royal treasury. Thus, it turns out that the clerk had unique qualities and exceptional skills, for which he was sent by John as a member of the diplomatic delegation to the caliph of Morocco. In light of the above-mentioned information, it seems apparent that Robert's participation in the delegation was the result of the recognition of the clerk's value to the king in previous positions he held, and not the opposite, as supposedly alleged by Paris in his *Chronica majora*. Robert of London's membership in the delegation is cast within a broad historical context and is richly detailed by a long chain of roles which he filled in the royal administration before and throughout the interdict. Due to the vast experience he gained in utilizing taxes owed to the Crown, John found in Robert of London, one of his highest officials ('Magistrum Robertum Londoniensem, clericum suum superiorem') as appears in the *Gesta abbatum*, the right person to join the delegation as the designated mediator, with qualifications for which diplomats were traditionally known: cultural adaptability, manners, and eloquence.⁶² From the delegation story, we also learn that it was precisely the physical appearance of Robert of London that induced the caliph to think that he must be an outstanding person;⁶³ otherwise, mused the caliph, the English king would not have appointed him as an emissary. It was suggested above that these ideas might have come from Paris's memories of Robert's words years after they were recounted and wherein was preserved Robert's desire to convince his friends that despite his distorted appearance, he was highly esteemed by the caliph. As such, Robert of London, in his designated position, represented in his person and in his stance before the caliph John's royal bureaucracy. The administrative infrastructure, very unusual in the feudal context but part of John's innovations in a period of transition, in which the diplomat acted on his behalf, allowed the Crown to enforce the king's law and to collect the greatest amount of profit to which he was entitled. In order to advance negotiations and perhaps complete the diplomatic process between the kingdom of England and the Almohads, John sent to the caliph's court one of his most highly skilled officials, one with wide-ranging experience, thorough understanding, professionalism, and the ability to enforce taxation and make

⁶² *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. by Riley, I, 236.

⁶³ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562: 'Perpendens igitur rex, quod tam despicabilis persona ad tam arduum negotium declarandum non destinaretur nisi saperet ut callidus et intelligeret' (The king then considered carefully that such a despicable person would not be deputed to explain such a difficult mission, unless he had knowledge and understanding).

maximum use of royal property rights. Robert of London was sent as a powerful tax collector on behalf of a powerful king. As in the case with Erdington, and even more so in light of the copious information that we have regarding Robert of London, what Paris attributes to the monk in the delegation story reveals once again the difficult position of historians. The identification of Robert is pivotal to the delegation story, and Paris forces historians, if only by placing Robert where he does, to consider an alternative reading.

The Earlier Years of Robert (the Possible Robert)

The blatant anti-Jewish expression in Paris's description of Robert likely was lost on neither Victorian nor contemporary historians. Also noticed by historians was that the brunt of calumny meted out by Paris in the delegation story was lodged against Robert, and not against John; and finally, that the 'treachery argument', regarding those who choose to leave the ways of their forebears and behave like St Paul, is an essential part of Jewish-Muslim, anti-Christian polemic. These three points, especially when considered together, have real repercussions on the problems in the delegation story, that is, on its historiographical paradox. Both those who maintain that the story is an extremely sophisticated work of fiction and those who maintain that the story recounts actual events find it very difficult to explain these damaging details. As a triad, these points undermine for both groups the established reading regarding an offer of subjugation and conversion. If we trace the points, as I now trace the 'earlier' Robert of London, an extremely simple answer presents itself: Robert may have been not an 'imaginary Jew' (to use David Nirenberg's term) but a converted Jew.

In our story, Paris gives a detailed description of Robert's visual appearance, which was, simply, that of a Jew:

The envoys retiring then shamefully, that king or admiral happened to notice Robert the clerk who was the third of the envoys, and who was small and dark, having one arm longer than the other and misshaped fingers, that is, two of them being joined together and with a face of a Jew.

(Recedentibus igitur cum rubore nunciis, intuebatur rex ille sive admiralius Robertum clericum, qui tertius erat nunciorum, qui parvus erat et niger, unum brachium

longius habens reliquo, et digitos inordinatos, scilicet duos sibi cohaerentes, et faciem Judaicam.)⁶⁴

Almost all the negative stereotypes that Christians associated with Jews at the time of Paris's writing were ascribed to Robert. Indeed, Paris had, in the opinion of modern scholars, an evident part in the shaping of those stereotypes.⁶⁵ The stereotypical features of dark-coloured skin and ugliness, prominent in Paris's description of Robert, were well known in medieval Christian literature and thus were interpreted by historians accordingly. The common claim was even granted a reply in the Jewish treatise *Nizzahon Vetus* (*Old Book of Polemic*). This treatise was written in the late thirteenth century, but parts of it were previously circulated in Western Europe. In this polemical work, the heretics ask: 'Why are most Gentiles fair-skinned and handsome while most Jews are dark and ugly?'⁶⁶ Wisdom was another feature stereotypically attributed to Jews. Within the context of Christian prejudices towards Jews, Paris supposedly attributed to the caliph such an opinion when he wrote that 'the king then considered carefully that such a despicable person would not be deputed to explain such a difficult mission, unless he had knowledge and understanding.'⁶⁷ In medieval Christian Europe, the educated Jew, an intellectual scholar learned in Scripture, was a stock image.

Further, because the Jews held the status of tolerated minority, they hardly ever initiated disputations with Christians. Indeed, for the most part they avoided debates due to the consequences of either winning or losing the argument.⁶⁸ Robert the monk personifies the typical image of the 'refraining Jew'. While the other members of the delegation were speaking with the caliph, Robert stood quietly to the side, and when the delegation returned and recounted the events to John, Robert again stood quietly off to the side.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

⁶⁵ Menache, 'Matthew Paris's Attitudes toward Anglo Jewry', pp. 140–41.

⁶⁶ Berger, *The Jewish Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, pp. 224–340.

⁶⁷ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562: 'Perpendens igitur rex, quod tam despicabilis persona ad tam arduum negotium declarandum non destineretur, nisi saperet ut callidus et intelligeret.'

⁶⁸ Rosenthal, 'Eduth Adonai Ne'emana', p. 378.

⁶⁹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 563, 'quia aliis loquentibus adhuc tacuerat, stans remotus' (for while the others were speaking, he had until now remained silent at a distance from him); also 'ut saltem sic perciperet quod favorabilius aliis audiretur, licet primo repulsus tacuisset' (so that he was immediately received more favourably than the others, although at first he had been repulsed and kept silent) (p. 564).

Yet most of all, in his *Chronica majora*, Paris attributes to Robert of London blasphemy, that quintessential of Jewish stereotypes. He is a godless man, and accordingly he embodies Jewish treachery (*perfidia*) which represents 'a continuous tendency to harm Christians wherever they are'.⁷⁰ Paris's words tell us a great deal about his stance towards Jews.⁷¹ Like contemporary Church authorities, he seems to have been quite ambivalent about them. In other places throughout the chronicle, the monk criticizes the manner in which this minority had been squeezed by the Crown, while in the delegation story Paris openly expressed his other views.

Matthew Paris may have taken this extreme position against the backdrop of the deteriorating situation of the Jews as they were used by the Crown to extract money from the barons.⁷² The Crown, the barons, the Church: everyone borrowed money from the Jews. Even the monasteries had borrowed from the Jews a large portion of funding for repayment of debts. Such was the dependence of the monasteries on the Jews, that in the monastery of Bury St Edmunds during the 1180s, the Jews used a reserved room in the monastery as a sort of bank and employed their families, who wandered through the monastery while the monks prayed. In his writings in the *Gesta abbatum*, Paris recounts that in St Albans in 1183, the wealthiest English Jew of the time, Aharon of Lincoln, boasted that his credit, and his credit alone, had built the largest chapel in the monastery.⁷³ Paris, although writing many decades later, surely found references to these Jews within the writings and read them, and perhaps even heard them discussed within the walls of the monastery. Aharon of Lincoln died in 1186, and though Henry II took most of his fortune, there was enough left for his inheritors to continue to loan money and to collect debts.⁷⁴ The financial connection between the Jews and the monasteries, in both Canterbury and in St Albans, continued throughout John's rule. John's reign marked the beginning of the political reaction towards English Jewry because the barons and the Church recognized the help the Crown derived from the Jews and associated the Jews with financial oppression by royal officials. These resulted in a radicalization of hostility towards the Jews. Still, during November 1207, John issued an order that threatened the confiscation of property against all creditors of

⁷⁰ Menache, 'Matthew Paris's Attitudes toward Anglo Jewry', pp. 141–42.

⁷¹ Menache, 'Matthew Paris's Attitudes toward Anglo Jewry', p. 144.

⁷² Menache, 'Matthew Paris's Attitudes toward Anglo Jewry', pp. 153–62.

⁷³ Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, p. 305; Mundill, *The King's Jews*, p. 25 n. 21.

⁷⁴ Richardson, *The English Jewry under the Angevin Kings*, p. 99.

Aharon of Lincoln's family. This means both that the family was still active in moneylending and that the monastery of St Albans held debt to the Jewish family, which the king demanded returned, to the Jews or on their behalf, to the treasury of the king.⁷⁵ The first years of Henry III's reign seem to have heralded a relaxation of financial pressure on the Jews, alongside a restitution of baronial 'good rights' and a general calming of the kingdom. However, this state of affairs changed in the mid-1220s, with the beginning of Henry's direct reign. The Jews became, as described by one scholar, the 'Royal Milch-Cow' of the Crown.⁷⁶ In fact, Paris expressed an outspoken stance against the assumedly converted royal cleric, Robert of London, during a period in which the situation of the Jews was incomparably more difficult than in the time of John. At the same time and not by happenstance, there was a significant improvement in the condition of converted Jews in the kingdom, beginning in 1232 when Henry III established the 'House of the Converted' (*Domus conversorum*) in London. Converts were granted the support and assistance of the Crown. Paris, it seems, revealed in his attitude towards Robert a duality of attitude not only regarding the Jews but also towards the converted among them. Prejudice against the Jews was probably part and parcel of Paris's worldview; however, as previous scholars have pointed out, it represents only one aspect of the complex attitude the chronicler monk held about the Jews. Thus it is possible that the attribution of a 'Jewish face' to Robert of London was merely part of general criticism against the Crown, and against John in particular, because of the way he used the Jews to subdue the Church and the barons. The English king is certainly found depicted above the Jew in the famous drawings on the 1233 Norwich tallage-roll, and as recently shown in the works of Sara Lipton and Anthony Bale.⁷⁷ Further, we know from other contemporary sources that the expression 'Jewish face' was used by Christians to describe any ugly person, and not specifically a Jew.

To attribute Paris's description of Robert to mere feelings of resentment toward the king's clerk, or as David Nirenberg recently put it, 'resisting Jewish government', is thus quite tempting.⁷⁸ However, Paris's use of this singular anti-Jewish phrase in the context of his other statements against the Jews, the for-

⁷⁵ Mundill, *The King's Jews*, pp. 148–49.

⁷⁶ Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, pp. 38–67; Nisse, "'Your Name Will No Longer Be Aseneth'", pp. 734–37.

⁷⁷ Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*; Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*.

⁷⁸ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, pp. 196–98.

mer of which emerges abruptly and occupies an important place in the story, suggests the idea that Robert might have been, after all, a converted Jew. Of the three diplomats, Paris expressed an anti-Semitic attitude towards Robert alone. Paris's description of the physical appearance and of the 'Jewish face' of Robert of London is unique and personal. Had Paris's attitude towards the king's clerks been based on his position as a Benedictine monk in relation to the officials of an oppressive king, he would have attributed Jewish qualities to the royal officials as a group, especially as a number of converted Jews were in King John's service. The fact that Robert of London was not sent as a diplomat on behalf of John to Christian lands but, rather, to a Muslim court supports the idea that the king found him, for particular reasons and perhaps influenced by his Iberian connections, fit for this mission.⁷⁹ It seems, then, that Robert of London, who was considered by John and the diplomats of the delegation a Christian monk and a king's clerk, remained in the eyes of Paris first and foremost a Jew. Is it possible to confirm this reading that Robert of London was a Jewish convert on the basis of historical facts? Perhaps it is. Among the earliest existing documentation referring to the Jews in London, there is one that attests a converted Jew from London, dubbed 'one of turntoes' (cum pedibus tortis).⁸⁰

The Jews had reached London already by the Norman Conquest. Surviving documentation about the migrants indicates that most became moneylenders. There are scattered references to physicians, merchants, soldiers (mostly those who converted to Christianity), and pawnbrokers. Jews were identified primarily by their hometowns. Thus, if in fact there was a converted Jew named Robert of London, it is likely that he bore the name of the city in which he resided. In the last quarter of the twelfth century Jews migrated to England from places farther away from Normandy and the territories ruled by the Angevins. These were Jewish immigrants from different backgrounds than the first migration, of the 'Norman' Jews.⁸¹ Jews reached London also from Germany and from Russia as well as from Spain and Morocco. For the most part they were accepted in the kingdom, and like the immigrants from Normandy they arrived with privileges from the king and barons for their contributions to the economic development of the renewed cities. Not a few of these Jewish immigrants to England converted to Christianity following a period of persecution by the Crown in the 1180s. These were supported by their masters or by the Church, since the law

⁷⁹ Stacey, 'The Conversion of Jews to Christianity,' p. 266 n. 19.

⁸⁰ Jacobs, *The Jews of Angevin England*, p. 88.

⁸¹ Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy*, pp. 355–77.

demanded the transfer of all of their property to the king.⁸² In a certificate of the London Commune from 1186, there is a list of the earliest Jews of London, and in it appear Jews that arrived from, among other places, France, Spain, and Morocco.⁸³ In this list we find a reference to a certain Jew, 'Deudon cum pedibus tortis', that is, 'Deodone (Jonathan) of deformed legs'. This Jew appears in the works of many historians of English Jewry, with reference to Jewish occupations and names. It is an example of a nickname given to a Jew in response to his prominent physical characteristics.⁸⁴ H. P. Stokes translates the nickname of this Jew as 'turntoes' and proposes, on the basis of his first name, Deudone, a Norman origin.⁸⁵ If indeed this same Jew who was found in London in 1186 and was identified per his physical deformity, which according to Paris was his deformed hands rather than toes, after changing his name during conversion and appearing decades later in the delegation story, then the chronological consistency of the reasoning needs to be established. If we assume that the aforementioned Jew was at least twenty years old when he converted, his date of birth must have been 1166. He appeared, still prior to his conversion, in the lists of the Jews of the Commune of London in 1186, and possibly around this time he converted. In 1203, that is, when Robert of London first appears in John's service, this person would have been thirty-seven years old. In 1214, when he is last mentioned in John's service, he is forty-eight years old, and when he told the delegation story to his friends in St Albans, perhaps a decade or two after the events themselves, Robert would have been in his late sixties.

The delegation story's literary upheaval featured Paris moving from detailing the injustices perpetrated by John to multiplying and amplifying these wrongs and attributing them to Robert of London. The chronicler of the delegation story shot arrows of unveiled criticism, mostly towards Robert. Paris's allegations of treachery, for instance, are aimed at Robert. In his view, Robert's greed impelled him to deceive the monastery and, on behalf of the king, steal the position of an appointed official. Robert, allegedly a man of the church and a clerk of the king, served neither master. In the eyes of Paris, the monk Robert of London worked for himself alone.

⁸² Richardson, *The English Jewry under the Angevin Kings*, p. 32. Paris refers to this issue both in the context of converting the Jews (*Ch. maj.*, v, 730) and with respect to the conversion of a group of Muslims who arrived in France in 1254 (*Ch. maj.*, v, 425).

⁸³ Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Jacobs, *The Jews of Angevin England*, p. 88.

⁸⁵ Stokes, *Studies in Anglo Jewish History*, pp. 63–67.

To this data we now join the third point related to Robert, to which I referred in the beginning of this section, that this contention of treachery towards one who does not follow the religion of his ancestors is a Muslim anti-Christian polemic. As much as the delegation story does not speak of any historical-political proposal for conversion on behalf of King John, it does seem to contain expressions of the world of images regarding conversion as conceived by the Muslim ruler. Paris preserved in his report layers of Islamic conceptions of Christians, perhaps of converted Jews to Christianity, from what might be read as autobiographical and theological perspectives. We have in our hands, then, an enthralling document that intertextualizes various aspects of interreligious interactions. It constitutes a rare linking of political history, autobiography, and theology, wherein politics and personal experiences rub shoulders with religious conceptions among medieval Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

Autobiography

A simple explanation of such points in the story as the conversion of St Paul and the caliph's simultaneous praise and condemnation of the apostle as regard to this conversion is that the text may be an autobiographical expression of the ruler of the Almohad Empire. In other words, as we shall learn shortly, the caliph was raised on the knees of Christianity but educated and remained loyal to the religion into which he was born, that is, the religion of his father: Islam. I suggest the possibility that when the caliph saw Robert and his peculiarities, especially his Jewish face, he recognized him as a convert. He was drawn, as the text explicitly reveals, to that person. From his very personal interest, this recognition may have suggested to the caliph the idea of broaching autobiographical issues with Robert.

Abū 'Abd-Allah Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb b. Yūsuf 'Abd al-Mu'min al-Nāṣir was born in 1180 to the caliph Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr and to a Christian slave woman by the name of Zahr. This information was recorded in a chronicle dated 1224 by a chronicler of the caliph's period, 'Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākushī. This chronicle, which is considered to be highly reliable, records the history of the Almohad dynasty, and is entitled: *The Book of Wonder: On the Summary of News of the Maghreb* (*Al mu'jib fi talkhīs akhbār al-Maghrib*):

The narrative of the reign of Abī 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Abī Yūsuf amīr al-Mu'minīn. This Abū 'Abd Allah is Muḥammad, son of Ya'qūb son of Yūsuf, son of 'Abd al-Mu'min son of 'Alī, his mother Umm-Walad, her name Zahr, Christian,

he was proclaimed caliph by his father's promise to him in the year 595; after his father's death and his father ordered him as caliph in the year 89.

(ذكر ولاية أبي عبد الله محمد بن أبي يوسف أمير المؤمنين: أبو عبد الله هذا هو بن يعقوب بن يوسف
 بن عبد المؤمن بن علي أمه أم ولد اسمها زهررومية ببيع له بعهد أبيه إليه في سنة 595 بعد وفاة أبيه
 وقد كان أبوه أمر ببيعته في سنة 89.)

Al-Marrākushī even describes the caliph's mother in Islamic legal terms, as *Umm-Walad*. It was extremely common for powerful rulers in medieval North Africa to have Christian mothers. The caliph al-Rashīd, who ascended the throne in 1232, 'owed a great deal to his mother Habāb, a Christian and former captive'.⁸⁶ Riccoldo da Montecroce pointed out that these women gave birth to the worst Muslim tyrants.⁸⁷ Indeed, it had become somewhat customary on the Iberian frontier. This was so much the case that the *fuero* of the city of Teruel on the Aragonese frontier, issued in 1176, ruled the death penalty to Christians who sent their daughters — or any Christian woman — as a hostage to the Muslims. The legislator explained: 'Because the Muslims would not dare to invade Christian territories, were it not for the courage of the men whom they, the Muslims, develop from marrying Christian women.'⁸⁸ Muḥammad al-Nāṣir, no doubt educated as a Muslim, was likely nursed by a mother who may have communicated to him sympathy for, if not a love of, Christianity. Only the caliph, and not Paris or Robert, could have recalled in such a straightforward manner St Paul, whom he knew from childhood from his Christian mother's longing. At the same time, Paul symbolized treason against the religion of one's forebears, someone who deserted his ancestral religion, an action despised by the caliph. From the caliph's point of view, this was not only a theoretical matter but also an intensely personal one.⁸⁹ His puzzling statement in paragraph 4:

⁸⁶ 'Umm al-Walad', in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. by Bearman and others, IV, 857–59. On Christian wives of Almohad caliphs, see Liang, 'Unity and Diversity across the Strait of Gibraltar', p. 21. This was not uncommon. The first Umayyad caliph, Mu'āwīya, had a Christian wife and the early eleventh-century Fatimid caliph, al-Ḥakim, was born to a Christian mother. See Lower, 'The Papacy and the Christian Mercenaries', p. 619.

⁸⁷ Daniel, *Islam and the West* (1960), pp. 164–84.

⁸⁸ Aznar y Navarro, *Forum Turolii*, pp. 195–96: 'Quia ut sapientes asserunt sarraceni cristianos nunquam invaderent nisi cristianorum audacia qui cum eis habitant, et filiorum cristianorum quas ipsi tenent et possident in uxores.'

⁸⁹ Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, p. 290. On the possible concern or even fear of the caliph of apostasy among Muslim inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula and even of North Africa, see Eisenbraun, 'Christian Success and Muslim Fear', pp. 167–71.

'had I been bound by no law, I would choose that law before all others, and having accepted it, would have embraced it', now resonates with sincerity.⁹⁰ As well, we can better understand the caliph's comments in paragraph 8 pertaining to conversion.

Al-Marrākushī records in a different chronicle the deathbed declaration of Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, al-Nāṣir's father. There, the caliph reinforces to his offspring the secret of Almohad political success — Islamic piety.⁹¹ There was to be no confusion between these private matters in the biography of the caliph and the official policy of the Almohads regarding the Christians under their rule; their background did not let these rulers from pursuing policies that could be interpreted as hostile.⁹² While the mere fact of being born to a Christian mother may not have predisposed al-Nāṣir toward Christian teaching, Paris's description of the caliph might have preserved evidence of that ruler's peculiar behaviour with Robert of London, in which he acted in a way that could be interpreted as sympathetic to Christianity.

Theology

While from the caliph's point of view, the issue did not come up as a theoretical one but rather pointedly from his personal involvement, this figure's 'many discussions' with Robert evidently included theological conceptions. Scholars have argued that in his effort to reproach King John, Paris used the Muslim caliph as the 'non-Christian' who condemns the impious Christian king. Yet the notion that the slighting reference to the converted Paul alludes to the Christian king's alleged conversion is extremely problematic. More likely, in my view, is that the caliph advances an authentic Islamic argumentation regarding Paul's conversion, rather than a satire built up by Paris. Even as an expert on Muslim anti-Christian polemic, Paris had no access to the Islamic anti-Pauline tradition that is found in his report of the delegation, and his interest, we must recall, was to denigrate King John.

The text contains one of the most complex traditions of Jewish anti-Christian, and then Muslim anti-Christian and anti-Jewish, polemics that circulated among Muslims and Jews, although it was unknown to Latin Europe in Paris's

⁹⁰ *Ch. maj.*, II, 560.

⁹¹ Ibn 'Idārī al-Marrākushī, *Histoire de l'Afrique du nord et de l'Espagne musulmane intitulée*, ed. by Dozy, II, 206–07.

⁹² Martínez Núñez, 'Ideología y epigrafía Almohades'; Molénat, 'Sur le rôle des Almohades'.

time. Consequently, Paris could not have used it as a source from which to concoct his story, nor would he have wanted to do so, as his target was John rather than St Paul. (Below, we shall see further evidence that supports the possibility of Robert of London being indeed a converted Jew.) He recounted the caliph's words verbatim, and Paris recorded them verbatim, as best he could remember. At this point, we will consider which of the various anti-Pauline Islamic traditions circulating at that time resurfaced in the caliph's arguments in Paris's Latin chronicle, and why.

Paul's conversion is archetypal in the Christian tradition. It stands as the defining event for those embracing the faith of Jesus among the Gentiles. His position as the main founder-falsifier of true Christianity has therefore been addressed from an early stage and in a rather complex manner: by sects of Christian Jews in late antiquity, by Muslims who accused him as a Jew who corrupted true Christianity, and later on by medieval Jews, possibly via Muslim influence. Even within the Christian tradition Paul has not been received without criticism. In Jewish-Christian sects, he was blamed for the supposed distortions of the original Christian message. They regarded Paul as an enemy for his appeal to the Gentiles and his cancellation of the commandments. From their point of view, Jesus saw himself bound by the law and strictly adhered to it: only Paul severed his followers from Judaism. Scholars have identified St Paul's conversion as a pivotal part of the controversy between the Christian and Jewish sects in late antiquity.⁹³

Some modern scholars have put forward the notion that even the Christians in the generations after St Paul's death took an ambivalent stance towards him. These scholars note that second-century church fathers such as Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Theophilus did not in the least relate to St Paul. Some scholars even hold that had not Marcion appropriated him, and had not Irenaeus and Tertulian endeavoured accordingly to interpret his thought as continuous with the Old Testament, St Paul would have taken a relatively modest place in Scriptural exegesis and in the history of the Church in general. It was Tertulian who presented St Paul as a complex personality who was simultaneously rooted in the Old Testament and rejecting of Judaism, the religion into which he

⁹³ Geiger, 'The Jew and the Other'; Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, pp. 246–66, 571–73; Maccoby, *The Mythmaker*, p. 172. On the school of scholarship known as the 'New Perspective on Paul', see Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, pp. 51–60; Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, pp. 52–61; Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea*, pp. 22–49; Rozen-Zvi and Ophir, 'Paul and the Invention of the Gentiles'.

was born.⁹⁴ In Christian apologetic literature, alongside scholarly arguments regarding the abandonment of pagan religion and traditions of the fathers, one finds an answer to Jews who claim, along with the pagans, that Christians are interlopers who abuse the Jewish Scriptures.⁹⁵

Jewish anti-Pauline accounts seem to have ancient roots. These are found in the alternative Jewish narrative or polemical work *Toledot Yeshu* (*The Book of the Life of Jesus*) presumably as early as the third century.⁹⁶ This work was familiar to Jews in Christian Europe, but it appears that the anti-Pauline channel in this narrative was not given particular attention. During the Middle Ages, European Jews addressed the subject of conversion in general in the context of disputations with Christians, but not with respect to Paul in particular. Reference to conversion in Jewish-Christian polemics, with an emphasis on the special role played by the Muslim, was a familiar theme. It is recorded in Judah Ha-Levy's *Kuzari* and later in the book of *Nizzahon Vetus*, where in fact the Muslim was foregrounded.⁹⁷

Among Jews in the Muslim world, *Toledot Yeshu* played a more complex role than it did in the Christian West. It is now known to have been circulated among Jews in the Muslim world, both in the Middle East and North Africa, and it served some Jewish writers to refute not only Christianity but also Islamic arguments. At the same time, when discovered by Muslims, it was adopted and served their polemicists in their attacks on both Christianity and Judaism.⁹⁸ Apparently influenced by the *Toledot Yeshu*, Muslim writers took the anti-Pauline arguments posed by Jews against the Christians and turned

⁹⁴ Dunn, *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, p. 227.

⁹⁵ Limor, and Stroumsa, *Contra Iudaeos*, pp. 62–63. Eusebius recalls this argument which was brought by both Jews and pagans, the latter presented apparently by Porphyry. Eusebius's object in writing his *Praeparatio evangelica* was precisely to answer this accusation. Modern research regarding St Paul's conversion seems to continue to vacillate between denial of a concrete conversion act on the one hand, and the emphasis on Paul's consciousness and on the way he was perceived as a Jew by his co-religionists on the other hand, regardless of how radical was his interpretation of the scriptures. See Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, pp. 16, 31–42; Maccoby, *The Mythmaker*, p. 268 n. 3. John G. Gager discussed this in his lecture given at the Department of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, entitled 'Chapters in the Jewish Encounter with Paul the Apostle', on 9 November 2005.

⁹⁶ Schäfer and others, *Toledot Yeshu* ('*The Life Story of Jesus*') *Revisited*, pp. 1–11.

⁹⁷ *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, ed. by Berger, pp. 10–12, 22, 188; Funkenstein, 'The Changes in the Religious Disputation between Jews and Christians'; Dan, 'An Ashkenazi Story of the Conversion to Judaism of an Arab King'.

⁹⁸ Alexander, 'The Toledot Yeshu in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate', pp. 137–39, 147.

them against the Jews themselves. In this recycling of arguments, reference to Paul appeared time and again in the Islamic orbit, and engagement with his conversion and activities came to the fore.

It was a Jewish contention that Jesus had observed the Law, and that it was Paul who had distanced himself and his followers from Judaism.⁹⁹ The idea that Christianity was in its early days a true prophetic revelation, and that Paul had altered and falsified it, hence establishing existing Christianity, was an Islamic modification of the Jewish idea.¹⁰⁰ Muslim writers altered the material to suit their needs, contending that Paul's incitement was responsible for the abandonment of true Christianity and bitterly criticized his personality and activities.¹⁰¹ Hava Lazarus-Yafeh accurately notes 'that some motifs of Muslim anti-Christian polemics originated in anti-Christian polemics of pre-Islamic Jewish origins, we have the chain of influences, coming full circle, as it were'.¹⁰²

Scholars consider *Toledot Yeshu* to be the source of the anti-Pauline stand expressed in the mid-ninth-century Jewish polemical tract written in Arabic, known as *Qissat Mujādalat al-Uṣqūf* (*The Polemic of the Priest*), later adapted into Hebrew as *Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer* (*The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*). Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa argue that the anonymous writer of *Qissa* used a recension of *Toledot Yeshu* as his source material on Paul, where the contention that it was Paul who was responsible for the distortion of early Christianity and for the deification of Jesus is evident. They also refer to the ninth-century Jewish polemical work of Dawūd b. Marwān al-Muqāmmis's *Isḥrūn Maqāla*.¹⁰³ Striking parallels between *Toledot Yeshu* and some aspects of the Islamic image of Paul were found by scholars in other works, such as the eleventh-century al-Damīrī's commentary on the Qurān, which refers to eighth-century al-Kalbī, as well as 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad in his *Tathbīt Ḍalā'il Nubuwwat Sayīdina Muḥammad* (*The Establishment of Proofs for the Prophethood of Our Master*

⁹⁹ Van Koningsveld, 'The Islamic Image of Paul', pp. 210–16.

¹⁰⁰ Lazarus-Yafeh, 'On Jewish-Christian Polemic and its Islamic Origins', p. 53; Tolan, 'Sparring with the Pen', pp. 249–50. His reference is to Ibn Adret's 'Tract Against Ishmael', addressing Ibn Ḥazm.

¹⁰¹ On the scholarly debate around Shlomo Pines's claims, see Alexander, 'The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate', pp. 145–47.

¹⁰² Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics', p. 69.

¹⁰³ Lasker, and Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, pp. 13–22. On the 'misleading' echoes of the *Toledot* which these scholars find in *Qissa*, see Alexander, 'The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate', p. 145; Lasker, 'The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam'; Limor, *Judaism Examines Christianity*.

Muhammad). All these writers expressed the Islamic image of Paul, probably using materials from *Toledot Yeshu*.¹⁰⁴

I take particular interest in another Islamic account of Paul that has *Toledot Yeshu* among its sources. I refer to *The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquest* (*Kitāb al-riddah wa-l-futūḥ*) of the eighth-century eastern historian Sayf b. 'Umar al-Tamīmī (d. 796). In 1991, a thirteenth-century Egyptian or Syrian manuscript of the *The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquest* was discovered. It was edited in 1995 by Qāsim al-Samārrāi.¹⁰⁵ In 2009, Sean Anthony published an article dedicated to the Sayfan narrative brought to light by this manuscript and concerning the origins of Christianity and its Pauline corruption. The narrative structure of Paul as a Jewish source of corruption appears in the writings of Muslim historians and commentators from the ninth century onwards. None of these however has drawn upon Sayf b. 'Umar's text as a source.¹⁰⁶

Sayf b. 'Umar's narrative appears in the author's historical work in a discussion on the factors which led to the assassination of Caliph 'Uthman. According to the story, Paul and his unbelieving Jewish subjects persecuted a Christian community from their homeland. Then Paul, the king of the Jews, abandons his kingdom, gains the trust of the Christian community by a cover-up, and tempts its leaders into believing a corrupt version of their previously pure faith, the teaching of which had once closely resembled the tenets of Islam. The remaining true Christians flee back to the Jews of Syria where they live an ascetic lifestyle until the appearance of Muhammad.¹⁰⁷ This 'Paul account' differs from references made by other Muslim writers and includes specifics on 'King Paul', the detractor and forger.

This is particularly interesting in light of the relatively marginal reach of the 'King Paul account' in Islamic anti-Christian polemic, and considering the poor historical evaluation in terms of transmission requirements (*isnād*) that Sayf's account has been accorded by medieval Muslim writers. The figure of 'King Paul' is absent from al-Tabarī's tenth-century 'History' (*Tārīkh*), and from Ibn 'Asākir's twelfth-century 'History of the City of Damascus' (*Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*). Perhaps, as Sean Anthony argues, when writing his uni-

¹⁰⁴ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', pp. 196–97.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Samarrai, '*Kitāb al-Riddah wa-l-futūḥ*', كتاب الردة والفتوح وكتاب الجمل ومسيرة عايشة، وعلي تأليف سيف بن عمر التميمي، تحقيق وتقديم الدكتور قاسم السامرائي، لايدن، هولندا

¹⁰⁶ Barzegar, 'The Persistence of Heresy', p. 226.

¹⁰⁷ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', p. 166.

versal history, al-Tabarī valued Ibn-Ishāq's authority far more highly than that of Sayf b. 'Umar with respect to materials on Christian origins. Anthony suggests some considerations through which he traced the origins of the anti-Pauline elements present in Sayf's account. These led him to conclude that 'Sayf's account shows dependence on non Muslim sources, [...] that rather amounted to a second adaptation of an ancient version of the anti-Pauline account in the Jewish *Toledot Yeshu*'.¹⁰⁸ P. S. Van Koningsveld argues that the omission of Sayf's report on Paul in al-Tabarī's work may account for the more or less neutral attitude towards Paul in eastern Islamic historical works.

As I read Sayf b. 'Umar's account of Paul, I was intrigued by the remarkable similarity it bears to the caliph's discussion with John's diplomat, Robert of London, in Paris's chronicle. It was as if the Sayfan account of Paul emerged from the Latin text of the caliph's conversation with Robert. In other words, we might be witnessing the incredible resurfacing in an English chronicle of a relatively peripheral polemical Muslim anti-Jewish and anti-Christian treatise based on an ancient Jewish tract against Christianity.

I now suggest that when he entered into discussion with Robert, the Almohad ruler could not but refer to Sayf b. 'Umar's work with which he was apparently quite familiar, that of 'King Paul' the Jew who was responsible for the corruption of Christianity. It is to be noted that the image of Paul in sources from the Western Muslim world was closely linked to Sayf b. 'Umar's report. The eleventh-century al-Andalusian Ibn-Ḥazm relied on the Sayfan account, and so did the anonymous also al-Andalusian early thirteenth-century writer usually called al Imām al-Qurṭubī.¹⁰⁹ However, the structure of Sayf b. 'Umar's Paul account and the appearance of some details that are specific to him support my contention that it was Sayf's independent Paul account rather than other anti-Pauline accounts that exited the Almohad caliph's world of images in his encounter with Robert. The English diplomat, who he arguably identified as a converted Jew, reminded the caliph of the prototype of the Christians' King Paul. In addition to his position as a ruler of the Almohad Empire receiving a proposition on behalf of John, king of England, and regardless of his biographical involvement with Christianity, Muḥammad al-Nāṣir seems to have

¹⁰⁸ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', pp. 194–99. Among his considerations were the striking parallels between Elijah/Paul of the *Toledot*, and Paul of Sayf b. 'Umar. Elijah was a model of Jewish zealotism in the kind of Judaism that Paul had favoured prior to his conversion.

¹⁰⁹ Van Koningsveld, 'The Islamic Image of Paul', p. 212; Monferrer Sala, 'Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī'.

found in Sayf b. 'Umar's polemical account an arresting parallel to what he was in fact witnessing in his interaction with Robert. A polemical treatise turned before his eyes into a life study. I will now review the major elements of overlap between Sayf's Paul account and Paris's chronicle that will clarify this point.

The first element touches on the irony in both stories. As Anthony points out in his textual analysis,

the net effect of Sayf's account is that it narrates Islam into the story of ancient Christianity, and this is done particularly through employing qur'anic discourse. Indicative of this are ironically, the teaching of his nefarious Paul. Paul was an outspoken Jew who converted to Christianity as a subterfuge in order to combat Christianity.¹¹⁰

Indeed, though conversion of adherents to other religions was the stated goal among Christians and Muslims, converts were simultaneously subjected to criticism and suspicion. In this, Islam was similar to Christianity. The *Apologia* of al-Kindī, which had a great impact on Christian-Muslim polemics beginning in the eleventh century, had the caliph al-Ma'mūn contemptuously discussing the hypocrisy of converted Christians and Jews.¹¹¹ However, Paris's text documents far more than contempt of converts. We see traces of the structure and essence of this Sayfan irony. We have encountered the caliph's seemingly contradictory opening of his monologue in paragraph 4 with respect to Paul:

I was just now looking at a book written by a learned Greek and a Christian, named Paul, which is written in Greek, whose acts and words have given me much pleasure, and I accept them; one thing, however, about him displeases me, that is that he did not adhere to the law under which he was born but turned to another, just as a deserter and a waverer.¹¹²

A second element that overlaps in both stories touches on identity. Sayf b. 'Umar's prime objective in inserting the 'Paul account' into his *Kitāb al-riddah* was to expose the perils to Muslim identity and integrity posed by yet another converted Jew, 'Abd Allah b. Sabā', also known as 'Abd Allah b. al-Sawdā' ('son of the black women'), and his followers. In what amounts to an explicit com-

¹¹⁰ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', p. 166, 182; van Koningsveld, 'The Islamic Image of Paul', p. 208.

¹¹¹ *The Apologia of Al Kindy*, ed. by Muir, p. 63. On Muslim polemic against Christianity, see Bouamama, *La Littérature polémique musulmane*, and especially Tolan, *L'Europe latine et le monde arabe*.

¹¹² *Ch. maj.*, II, 560.

parison between Paul and Ibn Sabā', just as the villainous Jew Paul corrupted the Christians so, Ibn Sabā' and the Sabā'īya sect intended to do to the Muslim *umma*.¹¹³ Paris has the caliph identify in the diplomat 'a small dark' figure (*parvus erat et niger*) and with the face of a Jew, yet tonsured as a Christian clerk.¹¹⁴ It may have been Robert himself who was the object of these comments on behalf of the caliph addressed to St Paul, as he himself personified the Jew's persisting heresy, both as Paul and as Ibn-Sabā'. And here is where history and theology coincide. The caliph saw before him a black, Jewish convert to Christianity, the living figure of 'Abd Allah b. al-Sawdā'. And as the text of *The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquest* records: 'And the like of Paul in this community is Ibn Sabā'. Ibn Sabā' was a Jew of the people of Ṣan'ā'. His mother was black, he converted to Islam at the time of 'Uthman, then he passed through the lands of the Muslims trying to lead them astray.'¹¹⁵ In Paris's chronicle, the same issue of identity appears when in paragraph 9 the caliph turns to Robert the monk: 'And he added that if Robert deviated from the truth in his replies, he would never again believe a Christian, especially a cleric. Then Robert, taking an oath by his Christian law, undertook to answer everything truthfully.'¹¹⁶

Due to the caliph's personal background, perhaps also due to Robert's resemblance to Ibn al-Sabā's figure as depicted by Sayf b. 'Umar, he was drawn to this diplomat. Bearing in mind the traditional topos of the untrustworthiness of the Jews and gazing at its living model, the caliph needed to be assured he could trust both the diplomat and the king on whose behalf this convert had been sent.¹¹⁷

There might even be more in the caliph's words with regard to identity and to the Islamic concept of the corruption of Holy Scripture. Among Sayf b. 'Umar's sources was second-hand knowledge of New Testament materials, which he took to be a later Greek inexact 'translation' of the 'original' Hebrew Gospels, as did other Muslim authors. Some authors even referred to these

¹¹³ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', p. 183; Al-Samarrai, *Kitāb al-Riddah wa-l-futuh*, p. 134.

¹¹⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

¹¹⁵ Al-Samarrai, *Kitāb al-Riddah wa-l-futuh*, p. 135.

¹¹⁶ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

¹¹⁷ Fuller, *The Church History of Britain*, p. 344. Fuller adheres to the delegation story while engaging in English Church history. He makes mention of the fact that the Muslim caliph criticized St Paul, who was born a Jew.

materials as the 'Books of Paul'.¹¹⁸ The Muslim tradition expressed in Sayf's work adjusted the Jewish argument and proclaimed that Paul was responsible for the falsification (*takhrif*) of the Holy Scriptures.¹¹⁹

In our delegation story, the caliph tells Robert about a book written in Greek, authored by a Greek and a Christian scholar named Paul. These references seem to echo originally Jewish, but also Christian-Jewish polemical claims, from which apparently important Islamic arguments against Christianity evolved. That Paul was perhaps vacillating between Jewish and Greek identities (that Paul held Roman citizenship, and that Greek was not the original language of Christ and his disciples) were Jewish allegations.¹²⁰ Early Christian thinkers had considered the claim that the Jewish Holy Scriptures had been tampered with. The Septuagint, the translation of the Bible into Greek which was geared towards Greek-speaking Jews in the Hellenistic world to whom St Paul preached in Greek, was received by the Christians as a valid text. Later, Jews or Jewish converts to Christianity made other translations to Greek with changes that placed into question the Septuagint translation. The Jews were accused of intentional corruption of the versions, with the object of confusing Christians and depriving them of access to texts that confirm Christian doctrine. Shortly thereafter, the church fathers understood this to be a self-defeating claim and it disappeared.¹²¹ Sayf b. 'Umar makes no explicit reference to the language in which his sources of New Testament, especially Lukan materials, were written. It is therefore difficult to point to a direct overlap between his 'Paul account' and the caliph's remark about Paul in Paris's chronicle. Nonetheless, such knowledge might well have been part of the caliph's world of images.

A third element common to both stories is the attitude towards treachery. As the caliph might have known from Sayf b. 'Umar's 'Paul account', Paul was an impostor Christian, 'one who wears their cloths', who forced the Christians

¹¹⁸ Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics', p. 64; Lasker and Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*: 'if you say that He is one, then you deny the Gospel, the Psalms and the book of Paul' (p. 61); 'it has already been written in the seventh Book of Paul [...]' (pp. 107–08); and commentary (p. 148). On Sayf's second-hand knowledge of New Testament materials, see Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', pp. 175–77, 182.

¹¹⁹ Tolan, 'Sparring with the Pen'; Whittingham, 'The Value of *tabrif ma'nawi*'.

¹²⁰ Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, p. 269; Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, p. 99; Geiger, 'The Jew and the Other'.

¹²¹ Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 145–47, with reference to William Adler, n. 36.

into monasticism, a religious innovation.¹²² In Sayf's account, Paul 'left his kingdom and wore their clothes': فترك ملكه ثم لبس لباسهم ثم أتبعهم ليضلهم حتي أنهي إلي عسكرهم. ¹²³ By such a reading of Paris's report, with its allusion to Sayfan 'Paul account' tradition, the Muslim caliph's identification of Robert can be understood: 'And observing his crown and tonsure realized that he was a clerk and ordered him to be summoned to his presence.'¹²⁴ Again we recall the caliph's warning to Robert, that 'if he deviated from the truth in his replies, he would never again believe a Christian, especially a cleric'.¹²⁵

Another and very important substantiation of my argument that the caliph in Paris's chronicle specifically had in mind the Sayf b. 'Umar's 'Paul account' when talking with Robert is that both refer to Paul as a 'King' who abolished jihād. I note again that Paul being titled as 'King' and mentioning his abolition of the jihād has no parallel in other Islamic traditions on the apostle and seems to be unique to Sayf's story. We read in *The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquest* about Paul: 'Then he continued, Paul, his tecnonym was 'Abū Shā'ul being the king in those days killed the Christians, so they fled [...] so he left his kingdom.'¹²⁶ This belligerent king abandons his kingdom and tempts the Christians into believing a corrupt version of their previously pristine faith. Amongst other things, King Paul urged the Christians to disclaim their right to wage jihād. Paul's words in *The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquest* read as follows: 'I think that no one ought to be harmed and no one recompensed so whoever does evil to you, do not give him what he deserves. If one slaps his cheek, let him turn to him the other, and if he takes some of his clothing, let him give him the rest of it. They accepted this and abandoned warfare.'¹²⁷

¹²² Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', pp. 179–80. Sayf b. 'Umar, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 135: إنما نلزم الكهاف ورؤوس الجبال والسوامع نسيح في البلاد، فخلوا غنهم وتآلفوا بهم النقية، فاتخذوا السوامع والكهاف وساحوا واضطروا إلي البدعة، فهو قوله تعالى: "ورهبانية ابتدعوها ما كتبناها عليهم إلا ابتغاء وخوان الله فحارعوها حق رعايتها"، يعني التوحيد، فاختلّفوا فيه وهم أيضا إلا فرقة منهم "فأبحنّا الخين أحنوا"، منهم وهم "علي عحوهو"، منهم من فرقة المؤمن وغيرهم "فأحببوا ظاهرين" بالحجة وخروج محمد صلي الله عليه وسلم. وكان مهرب المؤمنين منهم إلي جزيرة العرب، فأدرك النبي منهم ثلاثون راهبا يمنوا به

¹²³ Al-Samarrai, *Kitāb al-Riddah wa-l-futuh*, p. 133.

¹²⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

¹²⁵ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

¹²⁶ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', p. 175; al-Samarrai, *Kitāb al-Riddah wa-l-futuh*, p. 132.

¹²⁷ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', pp. 175, 177; Sayf b. 'Umar, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 134: قال: أري أن لا يؤدي أحد ولا يكافأ فمن عرض لكم يسوء فلا تكافؤه فإن لطم خده: بذل له الأخذ الأخر وإن أخذ بعض نيابة زاده بقيتها، فقبلوا ذلك وتركوا الجهاد

The caliph's interchanges with Robert of London parallel this account in a striking way. The al-Nāṣir's reference to 'your king' when he allegedly scorned John in paragraph 4 was directed, in my view, at Robert's 'king', that is, at Paul the Apostle. I would argue that by reading the caliph's words as directed at Robert, he was in fact taking his 'polemical stand': when referring to 'your king', he may have criticized no other than Paul. If John's proposal did not include any reference to his own conversion, and if, as noted, the caliph may have concluded diplomatic negotiations with the English, his anti-conversion stance would have been directed exclusively towards Robert, with whom he conducted such discussions. It must have been Paris who interpolated into the text his goals by intertwining the oddest comparison between the Christian apostle (Paul) and the Christian king (John) with respect to their conversion: 'I say this with regard to your lord, king of the English, who is sliding away after abandoning the most pious and pure law of the Christians in which he was born, unsteady as he is.'¹²⁸ The caliph goes on to criticize that king's avoidance of the commendable spilling of blood, that is, war or jihād: 'Rather, on the contrary I have often read and heard of many who gained liberty for themselves with much effusion and pouring of their blood, which is laudable, but I just heard of your despicable lord, who is idle and a coward.'¹²⁹

A last point of conjectural resemblance between Sayf b. 'Umar's 'Paul account' and the theological world of images as expressed by the Almohad caliph in Paris's chronicle relates to true Christianity. As Sean Anthony has noted, Sayf describes Jesus's teaching as the universal message of the prophets by positing the message of the Qurān as such. He does that by presenting Paul as perverting both Jesus's teaching and the Qurān's message.¹³⁰ Sayf b. 'Umar has the believer (al-Mū'min) say 'we are the companions of Jesus. Without him [Paul], surely we saw Jesus and listened to him, and obeyed him'.¹³¹

By reading the theological references in Paris's chronicle as the surfacing of Sayfan anti-Pauline Islamic tradition through the caliph's words, we can better understand the Almohad ruler's words in paragraph 4, alluding as I suggest to Robert's 'king', that is, to Paul, and possibly at the same time to the caliph's personal and historical attitude towards 'true Christianity'. Had this faith been

¹²⁸ *Ch. maj.*, II, 560.

¹²⁹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 561.

¹³⁰ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', p. 182.

¹³¹ Sayf b. 'Umar, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 134: لا والله ما حاول هذا إلا فسادكم! ونعجب من قبولنا عنه ونحن أصحاب عيسى دونه وقد رينا عيسى وسمعنا منه وقبلنا عنه

kept in its pristine form, the caliph would have embraced it, as Islamic doctrines do embrace uncorrupted teachings of the prophet Jesus, and as personal concerns regarding assimilation and integrity of Muslim identity preoccupy al-Nāṣir: 'after abandoning the most pious and pure law of the Christians in which he was born [...]. And he added: 'The omniscient and omnipotent God, creator of all things knows that had I been bound by no law, I would choose that law before all others and having accepted it, would have embraced it.'¹³² Here, we are reminded of the extreme sophistication of the text Paris had, probably unintentionally, written.

First, we must keep in mind the English chronicler's interests in informing his audience of the delegation story. Robert's description of John in paragraph 9 seems completely unrelated to the monk's response to the caliph's polemical arguments; rather, like Erdington's words before, it was a list of King John's wrong-doings Paris had at the ready to insert at the time he wrote his chronicle. It was Paris, then, who intervened and directed the caliph's words originally directed at Robert's King Paul, to 'your lord, king of the English'.

Second, we have seen already in an earlier context the possibility of reading the words 'bound by no law' (*exlex*) and 'already apostatized' (*jam apostatae*) as expressing John's status during the papal interdict. In the current context, these words can be read differently: the first, *exlex*, expressing the caliph's personal perspective, and the second, *jam apostatae*, his polemical stand towards the converted Jew. Jesus, according to Muslim authors who follow pre-Islamic Jewish-Christian arguments, did not annul Jewish law, and they even stated explicitly that he had not come to change it. Paul, however, was among those who later changed Jesus's text and added and detracted, falsified, and forged.¹³³ Sayf's 'King Paul' has converted and abandoned the law. Hence the caliph's disappointment as manifested in paragraph 8: 'The reputation or rather the infamy of your king, who has already apostatized, makes me positively ill', referring to no other than Robert's King Paul.¹³⁴

The emergence of these Islamic polemical arguments directed at Paul in Paris's citings of the Almohad caliph affirms what historians have already noted, that Sayf b. 'Umar al-Tamimī's *Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquest* was well known in al-Andalus and North Africa.¹³⁵ The fact that it is referred to

¹³² *Ch. maj.*, II, 560.

¹³³ Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics', p. 71.

¹³⁴ *Ch. maj.*, II, 562.

¹³⁵ Al-Samarrai, 'A Reappraisal of Sayf b. 'Umar as Historian', pp. 534–35.

by Andalusian Ibn Khair al-Ishbilī (d. 1179) indicates, as Marianne Cameron notes, 'that one 'Abu Bakr b. Sayf was a redactor of Sayf's *Kitāb al Riddah wa-l-futūḥ* in its entirety (i.e. not just fragments)'. His recension of Sayf's work was widely circulated in the Western Islamic world.¹³⁶ What might be added now in light of the suggested reading in the caliph's reference to 'your king' with respect to Paul, who abolished jihād, is that the Almohads were familiar with this version of Sayf's work which included the 'Paul account'. This marks as very appreciable the presence of 'Paul account' in the Almohad corpus of information about Christianity, because it suggests that a version of Sayf's *Kitāb al-Riddah* that was closer to the original may have circulated in Almohad libraries.¹³⁷ Its reflection in an English chronicle from the mid-thirteenth century makes it the first, albeit fragmented, appearance of these anti-Pauline Muslim arguments based on *Toledot Yeshu* in the medieval West. It attests the degree of intertwined political, personal, and cultural interactions between Almohad Muslims, Christians, and Jews at the time, far beyond the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean.¹³⁸

That of all anti-Christian Muslim polemical treatises and arguments the Almohad caliph recalled this narrative raises questions with respect to the Almohad ruler himself. After all, this work was written at a relatively early stage of Islamic history, and its context was fear of dissension, apostasy, and perhaps even the need of Sunni Islamic identity, as 'Abbas Barzegar suggests, 'to establish its internal and external borders at the intersection of the historical perceptions of Christianity and Judaism on the one hand and Shiism on the other'.¹³⁹ On the one hand, it may point to the self-perceptions of the Almohads and their fundamentalist inclinations as restorers of the ancient *umma* of Islam: 'The juxtaposition of the characters of Ibn Sabā' and Paul of Tarsus provides a framework whereby the internal and external boundaries of Islam are more

¹³⁶ Cameron, 'Sayf at First', pp. 65–66. Al-Ishbilī Muḥammad ibn Khair, *Fabricsāt ma rawah an shuyukhih*, ed. by Codera and Ribera, p. 237: فهرسة ما رواه عن سيوخته من الدواوين: 237: (index of the writings he had studied with his teachers).

¹³⁷ Al-Samarrai, 'A Reappraisal of Sayf b. 'Umar as Historian', pp. 531–37; Cameron, 'Sayf at First'; Landau-Tasseron, 'Sayf b. 'Umar in Medieval and Modern Scholarship'.

¹³⁸ Anthony, 'The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account', p. 174. Anthony locates three instances of Sayf's account of King Paul in Muslim works written in the last quarter of the thirteenth century that is much later than Paris's time. All three, however, are Western Muslim writers.

¹³⁹ Barzegar, 'The Persistence of Heresy', p. 209.

clearly defined and delineated.¹⁴⁰ The rhetorical power of the Ibn Sabā' myth circulating in Muḥammad al-Nāṣir's court is, phrasing Barzegar's words concerning the Mamlūk court, a feature of Almohad political and religious context attempting to assert their vision in the midst of repeated Crusader incursions. It might, on the other hand, support what Hava Lazarus-Yafeh contends, 'that the pluralistic nature of medieval Muslim society created a measure of open-mindedness among Muslims and provided a convenient setting for personal encounters and theological discussions between followers of different religions and sects'.¹⁴¹

More than anything, it seems that it was Robert's presence that caused the caliph to recall Sayf b. 'Umar's treatise. Given what we now know, we can describe the scene at the Almohad court in the summer of 1212 as an arresting coincidence of politics, personal experiences, and theological convictions.

The 'earlier' Robert of London, then, turns our question on its head. No longer do we wonder at the anti-Jewish prejudice, the ascriptions of calumny, and the allegations of treachery that leap from the lines. Instead, we are surprised that they were ever overlooked. Especially important is Norman Daniel's disregard of the anti-Christian polemics spoken by the Muslim, and his claim that this is an intra-Christian satiric criticism which has no particular reference to Islam, and might as well have been expressed by a witch-doctor.¹⁴² The delegation story would be further confirmed if the 'early' Robert of London was indeed a converted Jew. It would help to explain the anti-Jewish stand taken by Paris; that is, that he despises Robert and denigrates him, rather than John, as the scoundrel of the story. Further, Robert being a converted Jew would help to make sense of the otherwise baffling conversation that he had with the caliph.

The 'Possible' Later Robert of London

Robert was first mentioned as a clerk of the king in Chichester church, and with reference to this place it was the last time he was mentioned in the context of John's administration. The interdict on John was lifted on 20 July 1213. Removal of the ban on church activities in England, however, was contingent upon John fulfilling the terms of the agreement that he had signed with

¹⁴⁰ Barzegar, 'The Persistence of Heresy', p. 220; Al-Samarrai, *Kitāb al-Riddah wa-l-futuḥ*, pp. 135–38. The Ibn Sabā' story follows immediately the 'Paul account'.

¹⁴¹ Lazarus Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics', p. 62.

¹⁴² Daniel, *Islam and the West* (2009 edn), p. 223.

the pope. The negotiations stretched out due to the complex investigations required to distinguish between what was lawfully versus unlawfully collected from the church during the interdict. Only a year later, on 2 July 1214, was the interdict officially and completely removed.

Robert of London's abrupt disappearance from the royal documentation seems relatively simple to explain. In the summer of 1214, the papal envoys, representatives of the Church of England, and royal officials examined whether the conditions for the removal of the interdict had been fulfilled during the past year. Included among them were committees in the monastery of St Albans. It is very likely that Robert of London was concealed at this time by John and did not receive additional appointments, at least not in an official and public capacity. It was in John's interests, just as it was in Robert's, to keep a low profile. Robert, having done on behalf of the king most of the hard work to fulfill the fiscal potential of the church assets during the dispute, was probably unpopular, to say the least. This was true especially at St Albans, and it is exactly as it was described by Paris in the delegation story, in which the brunt of heavy moral charges were laid at his feet. If Robert did curtail his activities in the king's service, it is possible that John ensured that he retired on reasonable terms and, more than that, ensured his personal safety. Did Robert continue to own property that supplied his needs until his death? There is no reason not to believe so. Even if, as part of restitution of property which had not yet been returned to the church after the ban was lifted, Robert's services were no longer needed in all the places in which he had been appointed, the king likely left in his hands sufficient property from which to derive a livelihood or some guarantee of safety, after his many years of faithful service. However, we should not dismiss the possibility that Robert of London purposely remained at St Albans. Perhaps there, more than anywhere else, Robert was safest. At the monastery there was less of a likelihood that someone would dare to harm him at least until John's death, and harm done at the monastery would have been more difficult to conceal. In any event, the delegation story was overheard by Paris in St Albans. Robert of London told the story to his friends at the monastery, whether he lived there or was visiting and lived elsewhere. This, as I have mentioned above, Robert did years after the actual events themselves. And yet, although years had passed since those events, Robert may have decided to be circumspect regarding his roles in John's administration and perhaps also about his participation in the delegation on behalf of John to the caliph of Morocco. In light of this, we can readily understand why, as Paris wrote in the *Chronica majora*, Robert related to his acquaintances at the monastery a somewhat different story than that which he told his partners in the delegation when he

concluded his discussions with the caliph. Robert did this because he found himself in St Albans several years after John's death, about a decade after he had thoroughly confiscated the property of the monastery for the benefit of John's reserves, as the king's clerk appointed during the interdict. Robert may have been worried about his safety, and perhaps thus obscured his close connection to John after the latter's death.

If Robert of London had left St Albans by the time the interdict was lifted, whether due to choice or to circumstances that encouraged him to distance himself from the royal administrative ring, where did this monk live and what did he do after 1214? In documents from Scotland, from the archives of the bishopric of Glasgow, there appears a person by the name of 'Master Robert of St Albans' who is mentioned between December 1214 to January 1229, as the servant of one Walter of St Albans, bishop of Glasgow.¹⁴³ Robert of St Albans appears in over fourteen documents, mostly in the registers of Glasgow, with the sobriquet of *clericus*, but also under the titles *magister*, *dominus*, and *cancellarius*, meaning secretary of Bishop Walter. There is a strong correspondence between when Robert of London finished his activities as the king's clerk in the summer of 1214 and the time that a person carrying this name appears as Master Robert of St Albans in the diocese of Glasgow in December of the

¹⁴³ A person named Robert of St Albans appears among the clerks of Master Walter of St Albans. They both appear in documents assembled in a joined research project of the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as of King's College in the University of London, titled 'Paradox of Medieval Scotland, 1093–1286'. Scholars who participate in this project are interested in the growth of Scottish national identity during the High Middle Ages. The paradox lies, according to R. Davies, in the fact that the region where most of the Anglo-Norman families have settled, and which experienced a most intensive Anglicization process during that period, has been the region which kept most its independence from direct English rule in all the British islands. Scholars have established a wide database which supplies biographic information on almost all known individuals who lived in Scotland at the time. In the project website there appears, as mentioned, one Master Robert of St Albans: (Watt, *Graduates*, 475) 'Robert may have been from St Albans (Herts), but occurs in Scotland among clerks of Walter of St Albans, Bishop of Glasgow. Usually styled "clerk" but is also called "bishop's chancellor" in acts of Bishop Walter.' Robert is mentioned in fourteen documents, the earliest from 4 December 1214, in Document 3/453/1 (*Glas. Reg.*, no. 105) at the consecration ceremony of Bishop Walter. The latest, Document 2/144/42, is dated 7 October 1256, where Robert is addressed as 'chancellor' (Theiner, no. 189).

Apart from one document, dated 5 December 1214, in which Robert received land and a mill, close to a church, he appears in all other documents in the context of the Bishop's activity. See 'Robert of St Albans, master, clerk' <<http://poms.cch.kcl.ac.uk/db/record/person/3607/>> [accessed 14 April 2016].

same year. If these two men are indeed one and the same, Robert may have distanced himself or was removed to Scotland for safety, where he worked in the service of Bishop Walter in Glasgow, who was himself originally a man of the church of St Albans. It is possible that Robert was known in Glasgow by the name of 'Robert of St Albans' and not as 'Robert of London', simply since he arrived from there and that St Albans was the place of his last activity before he arrived in Scotland, or, alternatively, because he needed to obscure his identity as a known clerk of John, who oversaw the ecclesiastical tax collection from its centres of England during the interdict. It is also possible that the change of the name 'Robert of London' to 'Robert of St Albans' was made to differentiate him from Robert of London, son of William 'the Lion', king of Scotland.¹⁴⁴

Even if Master Robert of St Albans was actually the Robert of London found in the diocese of Glasgow, over the years, with the tide of forgetfulness obscuring the events of John's reign, Robert might have returned to St Albans for a visit. Perhaps at that point he told his acquaintances, within earshot of Paris, his memories of the delegation in which he participated, an event that occurred many years in the past. Still at this stage, Robert the monk managed to plant slander about John in his stories. Master Robert of St Albans was mentioned once again for the last time in the document from the bishopric of Glasgow, on 7 October 1256, and this date appears to be close to the time of his death. If our Robert was indeed a converted Jew, and if he is to be identified with 'Robert of St Albans' in the later part of his life, then he lived until the unusual, though not unheard of, age of 90.

Using the information supplied by Paris in the delegation story regarding another person, Walter the painter, whose historical authenticity can be established, and relying on further circumstantial evidence, it might be possible to estimate the date on which Robert of London related the delegation story in St Albans. Paris had written that he heard the story as Robert of London told it to his acquaintances in the monastery.¹⁴⁵ As the again-scrupulous historian, Paris sharpens the context and adds to the testimony the names of the others who heard the story from Robert at that time. One was Laurence, a knight of the seneschal; a second, a monk also named Laurence; and the third, Master

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, 'Robert de Londres', pp. 99–117. A person named Master Robert of St Albans is recalled in a document in which King Henry III grants him protection against claims of debt on behalf of the Jews; see Menache, 'Matthew Paris's Attitudes toward Anglo-Jewry', p. 153 n. 84. On William I, see Scott, 'William I [William the Lion] (c. 1142–1214)'.

¹⁴⁵ Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 2, 14.

Walter, 'monk and painter' (Walterum monachum pictorem).¹⁴⁶ We learn that Robert particularly liked these individuals, and they were the ones to whom Robert not only told the story of the delegation but to whom he also showed the jewellery and the other gifts he had received from the caliph.¹⁴⁷ We have no information regarding the two Laurences. However, it is possible to identify with a considerable degree of certainty Master Walter the painter as a historical figure, and it is possible to determine the latest date ('terminus ante quem') that Robert of London told the story of the delegation to the monks at the monastery of St Albans.

In the beginning of the thirteenth century, spearheaded by Abbot John de Cella, the monastery of St Albans became one of the most important centres of artistic activity in Western Europe. Paris himself was a prominent artist at St Albans during the first half of the thirteenth century who tried his hand at painting, sculpture, and silversmithing. In the same period, Master Walter from Colchester was active in the monastery. Paris referred to him as the most important artist in St Albans, and there is reason to think that Master Walter was Paris's teacher.¹⁴⁸ In approximately 1200, Walter became a monk. He was appointed to serve as a church sacrist in 1213. Aside from his being an artist, Master Walter was also a sculptor, a wood carver, and a silversmith. Murals and jewellery created by this prominent artist are still exhibited at the monastery.¹⁴⁹ The historical context confirms the literal reading, and, according to it, Master Walter the artist was none other than the same Walter, among the acquaintances of Robert of London, to whom he told the delegation story. Since Walter the painter died on 2 September 1248, it is possible that Robert told the story directly to him prior to this date. I offer the year 1234 as the earliest date ('terminus post quem') before which there is very little likelihood of the story hav-

¹⁴⁶ *Ch. maj.*, II, 564.

¹⁴⁷ I am not aware of any research conducted on the possibility of Almohad influences on art and artists in St Albans. However, if Robert of London brought with him, as recorded by Paris, works of art, jewellery in particular, from the Almohad court, these might have been kept in the monastery and influenced the artistic work there. See Fromherz, 'North Africa and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', pp. 52–53. Paris made a list of the gems, artefacts, silks, and coverings owned by the abbey: see *Ch. maj.*, VI, 383–92; Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the Writing of History', p. 264.

¹⁴⁸ Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the 'Chronica Majora'*, pp. 27–28 n. 105, 425, 435; Lethaby, 'English Primitives I'.

¹⁴⁹ Rothenstein, *An Introduction to English Painting*, pp. 7–8; Thomson, *Manuscripts from St Albans Abbey*, II, 72.

ing been told in St Albans. If the story had been related prior to this date, one would expect its appearance in the chronicle of Roger Wendover, the chronicler who wrote before Paris and who appears to have stopped writing in the year 1235, close to his death on 6 May 1236. Wendover resided in St Albans until 1217. He collected materials and began writing the *Flores Historiarum* after 1214. In 1217, Wendover was appointed as vicar at Belvoir by William of Trumpington, abbot at St Albans, and was still serving at this extension of St Albans according to surviving documentation as late as 6 October 1224. Roger Wendover was apparently removed from this post by Abbot William in the early part of the 1230s, returned to St Albans, and continued writing his chronicle on the period between 1189 and 1234.¹⁵⁰

Robert of London was remembered by some in St Albans monastery from John's time. It seems that Roger of Wendover, however, because of his long absence from the monastery, had an acquaintance with Robert until the end of King John's days, but had lost touch with him. That Robert chose not to reveal the delegation story to him as early as 1217 might have reflected a fear that bringing his history to the awareness of Wendover would have jeopardized his personal safety or that of others, regardless of Robert's actual place of residence. According to this timeline, it was after 1234 that Robert recounted the delegation story to his friends in St Albans, by which time Roger of Wendover had stopped writing, and before September 1248, the date of Master Walter's death. This period coincides with the years in which Paris collected materials to write the *Chronica majora*.

¹⁵⁰ Jenkins, *The Monastic Chronicler and the Early School of St Albans*, pp. 46–47; Thomson, *Manuscripts from St Albans*, pp. 74–75.

THE POLITICAL-MILITARY BACKGROUND: NAVARRE, THE ALMOHADS, AND ENGLAND

The Strife over the Continental Fiefs and the Frontier Regions of the Iberian Peninsula

Towards the end of the twelfth and at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Iberian Peninsula was convulsed by power struggles and armed conflicts between the Almohads — a North African dynasty that imposed its rule over most of the Taifa Kingdoms in al-Andalus, thus curbing the momentum of the Christian assault led by the major Christian kingdoms at the time —, Castile, and Aragon.¹ As on previous occasions, neither side presented a uniform ‘religious’ or political front against the other. The military frontier did not necessarily lock together states in a mighty struggle for domination. Alliances constructed, disintegrated, and then recombined between Muslims and Christians created, to a great extent, political entities in the western Mediterranean, ‘facilitating the movement of military men, merchants, scholars, clerics, and a variety of artisans and service personnel’.² Richard Bulliet argues that the battles and political alliances occupy a central place in the historical narratives as a dividing factor between the Christian and the Muslim societies. He stresses, as is more widely accepted today in the field, that these were ‘peacetime activities that accounted for most of the cultural contact that took place during that period [when] a cornucopia of stimuli from Muslim lands most heavily in southern Europe, transformed many aspects of European life’.³ However, even during

¹ Cressier and others, *Los Almohades*, I, pp. xv–xx; Fromherz, *The Almohads*.

² Liang, ‘Unity and Diversity across the Strait of Gibraltar’, pp. 21–34.

³ Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, pp. 30–39.

the sometimes harsh military encounters, diplomatic contact and political alliances between the Christians and the Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula and evidently beyond were never completely severed. In fact, both Christians and Muslims established, breached, and renewed alliances with other than their co-religionists as part of common political culture. This was especially true of the period in which the Almohads stood at the head of a western Islamic entity, detached from the political structure of the Islamic East although open to it, as well as to the rest of the world, as an interested regional player.⁴

The historical background pertaining to John's ground-breaking measures reinforce what is revealed to us in the delegation story, that is, that contacts between the Christians and the Muslims encompassed the whole of Western Europe and North Africa, and not just the immediate frontier area in the Iberian Peninsula. I shall elaborate on these issues in the following pages. Some historians still maintain that while it was not uncommon in the Iberian Peninsula to sign a treaty with one of the Muslim kings, this action was not at all acceptable in England. The delegation story demands that this approach be reconsidered.

Amongst current scholars, Nicholas Vincent considers it probable that contacts and negotiations between England and the Almohads did occur, while other historians such as Adam Kosto and Allen Fromherz refer to these contacts as historical fact.⁵ I will pursue this line of inquiry and situate these contacts within the precise time and geopolitical circumstances as I understand them to be revealed by the historical documentation. Vincent proposes to link the negotiations with King John's attempt to ensure Almohad neutrality in order that he might cement an alliance with the king of Aragon and the count of Toulouse, to open a third front in those hostilities against Philip Augustus of France. However, Paris's delegation story reflects goals that are far more complex than the ensuring of neutrality. It emerges from the story that John offered the caliph a contract in which he, John, as an overlord of the duchies on the borders of Spain, would deliver his lands to the caliph in exchange for clear-cut protection of the English king's interests and sovereignty in these territories. It was the Almohad caliph who wanted to keep the English nonpartisan. It seems that within the geopolitical circumstances and the military predictions during

⁴ Cressier and others, *Los Almohades*, I, p. xix; Liang, 'Unity and Diversity across the Strait of Gibraltar', pp. 26, 30.

⁵ Kosto, 'Reconquest, Renaissance and the Histories of Iberia', p. 99; Fromherz, 'North Africa and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', pp. 47–48.

the summer of 1212, on the eve of the encounter in Las Navas, and in view of a possible wider Almohad incursion beyond the Pyrenees, John acted in order to secure, through an enterprising agreement with the Almohads, the protection of his continental fiefs on the border of Spain. That was several months prior to other and rather different circumstances, where developments such as joint interests with Pedro II of Aragon or conciliation with the pope appeared to be advisable. Historian John Tolan's suggestion appears to agree with Matthew Paris's perspective on the events, as reflected in his chronicle. Tolan notes some Christian writers, Paris included, 'who teamed up heretics, Muslims and traitors into an anti-Christian alliance' at that time.⁶

In May 1212, two rulers in the West prepared for an expedition to reconquer their lands. The Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir had assembled a formidable force to vanquish al-Andalus, to defeat the Iberian Christian kingdoms, and perhaps even to cross the Pyrenees. John, for his part, as Vincent puts it, 'had summoned a great army to attend him at Portsmouth ready to sail for the reconquest of his continental lands'.⁷ This geopolitical situation involved the mutual interests of both parties and motivated them to negotiate a strategic alliance specifically involving John's fiefs and alliances on the Spanish border.

Coalitions between Christians and Muslims in the War over the Fiefs: The Case of Navarre and the Almohads

The close personal and political ties between Sancho VII, king of Navarre (1194–1234), and the Almohad caliph Ya'qūb al-Mansūr and his heir al-Nāṣir piqued a great deal of interest on the part of contemporary chroniclers, as well as on present-day historians. Christians of non-Spanish origin, relatively unaccustomed to the frequency and immediacy of contact in the frontier regions between adherents of the two religions, were fascinated by the nature of this relationship, especially with regard to certain developments which began prior to the great confrontation in Las Navas and during its course in the summer of 1212.⁸

⁶ Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, pp. 182–83.

⁷ Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', p. 249.

⁸ Relations between the Christians of Navarre and the Muslims, in which marriages were involved, were not a novelty of the twelfth century. Already in 1008 ascended the throne of the Chaliphate of Cordoba, 'Abd al Raḥmān, who was named by his mother, a Navarrese princess, 'Sanchul' (little Sancho), after her father, King Sancho Abarca of Navarre. The Caliph disregarded Islamic rules and was known for mocking Muslim cult. See Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, II.3, pp. 3–40.

Two Christian kingdoms — León, to the north-west of Castile, and Navarre, lying north of Castile and of Aragon — were engaged in a war with Castile, and one of them, Navarre, had been for many years a close ally of the Muslim Almohads, supporting them against Castile. Pope Celestine III's letters to Sancho, chiding him about his ties with the Muslims, reveal that the king of Navarre received annual payments from the Almohads in return for maintaining a neutral stance vis-à-vis the hostilities.⁹ In 1195, one year after ascending the throne, Sancho exploited the weakness of Castile in the wake of the latter's defeat by the Almohads in the battle of Alarcos and attacked the kingdom along with the king of León, in collaboration with the Almohads.¹⁰ In 1197, circumstances turned to Sancho's disadvantage, when Alfonso VIII of Castile signed a non-aggression agreement with the caliph of Morocco, Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, and gave his daughter's hand in marriage to the king of León.¹¹ Alfonso and Pedro II of Aragon promptly turned against Navarre, and contemporary Christian sources relate that in February 1199, Sancho was obliged to leave his kingdom with a retinue of knights to seek aid from his allies, the Almohads, in Morocco.¹² According to the Latin chronicle of the kings of Castile (*Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*), the chronicle of Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, and various Muslim chronicles, Sancho stayed in the court of the Almohad caliph in Marrākesh, apparently from February 1199 until March 1201.¹³ Innocent III, elected pope in 1198, placed Sancho under interdict that same year for the king's relations with the Almohads and his hostilities against Castile. This measure did not prevent the pope from sending a letter to al-Nāṣir in March 1199, urging the caliph to permit the redemption of Christian captives.¹⁴ Agreements between Christians and infidels were not sanctioned by the Church, but quite a few such contracts and alliances were tolerated by the papacy in the frontier regions, in a characteristic reflection of

⁹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, p. 136; Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', p. 159.

¹⁰ Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII of Navarre with the Almohads', p. 12 n. 7.

¹¹ Al-Makkārī, *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, trans. by De Gayangos, pp. 321–22.

¹² *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, ed. by Canellas López, I, 317–18.

¹³ *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*, ed. by Desamparados Cabañes Pecourt, pp. 35–36; Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, *De rebus Hispanie*, lib. VII, cap. 32, see *Colección diplomática del rey Don Sancho VII*, ed. by Marichalar, p. 15. See also Maser, 'Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada'.

¹⁴ Innocent III, *Opera omnia*, cols 544–45, 8 March 1199; Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 166, 170.

the political and diplomatic cultural environment to which Innocent belonged and, indeed, in which he even played a prominent role.¹⁵ Christians, Muslims, and even Jews, participated as equal players on the Iberian frontier political-diplomatic scene. Amidst interrelated struggles in Europe and in North Africa and Muslim Spain, the first decade of the thirteenth century saw brisk diplomatic activity involving Christians and Muslims. In many cases, this activity was mediated by Jews. In February 1200, Pedro II sent a messenger, apparently a Jew by the name of Aben Benist, to Marrākesh.¹⁶ At the same time, Alfonso sent his Jewish vizier, Abraham Ibn al-Fakhār, to Morocco for the purpose of renewing the non-aggression pact between the kingdoms which was signed following the battle of Alarcos, while al-Nāṣir, for his part, sent a delegation to Castile when the agreement was breached.¹⁷

During 1211, the year in which the caliph al-Nāṣir entered Spain, and until the spring and summer of 1212, when he encamped on the frontier of al-Andalus facing the Christians, visits of Christian delegations to the Almohad court became so frequent that Ibn 'Idārī al-Marrākushī, author of the chronicle *Al Bayān al-Mughrib fī ijtisār akhbār mulūk al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib* (*Book of the Amazing Story of the History of the Kings of al-Andalus and Maghreb*), relates that that same year al-Nāṣir appointed an official whose name was Abū-l-Yays Muḥarib to the specially created post of overseeing the reception of the delegations. It was his task to take care of all of their needs during their visit and to arrange for the provision of translation services.¹⁸ Paris's specific reference to a translator's presence when the English delegation visited the caliph's residence and his interference in translating the envoys' words accords with the historical information in this respect.¹⁹ The Castilian chronicle also documented other aspects of the political relationship between Navarre and the Almohads, including a strategic treaty, right of passage through the fiefs, and tribute collection. The chronicler relates that King Sancho, having initially found himself in distress, subsequently set out on his way back to his kingdom and passed

¹⁵ Powell, 'The Papacy and the Medieval Frontier'; Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 157–78. On Innocent III's involvement in the struggle for mastery in Sicily and his search for Muslim support, see Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England*, p. 15. See also Stantchev, *Spiritual Rationality*, pp. 35–40, 44–55.

¹⁶ Assis, 'Jewish Diplomats from Aragonia'.

¹⁷ Decter, 'Before Caliphs and Kings', pp. 12–20.

¹⁸ Ibn 'Idārī al-Marrākushī, *Al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, ed. by Huici Miranda, I, 228, 258.

¹⁹ *Ch. maj.*, II, 563.

through Valencia, an Almohad province at the time, his coffers filled with revenues from levies and dues he had been allowed to collect from that land by the king of Morocco.²⁰ The kind of relationship revealed here, in the Castilian chronicle, between the Muslim caliph and the Christian king, differs significantly from that type of 'canonical' feudal relations typically practiced among the Christians, as for example, between John and Philip Augustus of France. Even when Sancho returned to Navarre, and even after he signed the agreement with the kings of Castile and León in 1202, he remained an ally of the Almohads.²¹ At no point, however, did Sancho receive military assistance from the Almohads, who may well have avoided compromising their delicate relationship with Castile. Sancho's agreement with the Muslims amounted to a sort of regional defence alliance between patron and client. The Almohads undertook to ensure the territorial integrity of Navarre and Sancho's rule thereof, and, in return, the kingdom of Navarre pledged strategic alliance to the Almohads in their war against Castile and Aragon, on some occasions waging campaign against its neighbours, while on other occasions remaining neutral. Roger of Howden, whose work provided Paris, as mentioned, with information regarding the nature of the alliance proposed by John, wrote that the Almohad caliph al-Manṣūr was himself already involved in a particularly close relationship with Sancho.²² Howden recorded a detailed description of the Almohad-Navarrese involvement, as manifested through marital ties, compulsory military service, religious conversion, and transfer of fiefdoms from one to another. Our current interest in Howden concerns how this chronicler has drawn the historical circumstances that tied Navarre so close to the Almohads. Howden recounts that the caliph's daughter became enamoured of Sancho of Navarre and urged her father to convince him to marry her.²³ The caliph maintained that such a union was impossible on the grounds that she was a Muslim and the king was a Christian, but the princess countered that she would willingly convert and live

²⁰ *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*, ed. by Desamparados Cabañes Pecourt, pp. 35–36: 'Rex Navarre destitutus omni auxilio, recepta quadam summa pecuniae et quibusdam redditibus sibi assignatis a rege maroquitano, in Valencia ibi multo tempore moram fecit' (After the king of Navarre had been forsaken of all assistance, a certain amount of money received, and some revenues assigned to him by the Moroccan king, in Valencia where he resided a long time). According to the chronicle, Sancho stayed among the Almohads from 1198 until 1201.

²¹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, p. 138.

²² On Wendover's use of Howden, see Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 23–24.

²³ On Howden's editing work particularly in his last days, see Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII with the Almohads', pp. 15–16.

as a Christian if only she could be united with her beloved.²⁴ The caliph's subsequent proposal to Sancho included the dispatch to him of sums of money and the transfer of all the fiefdoms in al-Andalus, from Portugal as far as Aragon, but made no reference to the princess's conversion. Sancho was disposed to accept the proposal and set out for Morocco. However, in the interim the caliph al-Manṣūr died, and his son and heir, who had difficulties in establishing his reign, held the king of Navarre as sort of a hostage, stipulating fulfilment of his father's proposed marriage transaction in return for Sancho's aid against his opponents. Left with no alternative, Sancho remained at the caliph's side for a considerable length of time, fighting with him against his enemies. The story is interrupted here, but further on in the chronicle Howden recounts that Sancho signed a treaty with the kings of Castile and Aragon who had invaded his kingdom, thus enabling him to return to Navarre.²⁵

The story as it appears in Howden's chronicle has been rejected by a number of historians on the grounds that it is inconceivable that an Almohad ruler on the verge of a holy war would offer his daughter to a Christian king, and even relinquish territories from his own empire as a dowry.²⁶ The sweeping rejection of the story by historians is remarkably reminiscent of their sweeping rejection of Paris's delegation story. This wholesale dismissal is based for the most part on a common reading of the episode of the transfer of all Muslim Spain's territory to Sancho and with regard to the conversion of the Muslim princess. As in the delegation story, historians accepted the reading of the text as referring to a conversion to which the caliph consented, not for the purpose of acquiring territories, but as a step in the process of relinquishing them. Many of Howden's details are historically irrefutable; however, the marriage proposal and its two conditions, conversion and territorial transfer, has been considered by scholars a fabrication. Indeed, many questions emerge. For instance, how does the image of Sancho as a king set to acquire all of the territories in Muslim Spain from Portugal to Aragon jibe with the story itself; that is, a king 'captured' and forci-

²⁴ *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houdene*, ed. by Stubbs, III, 90–92: 'Cui pater respondit, Quo modo potest hoc fieri, cum tu sis pagana, et ille Christianus? Cui filia respondit, parata siquidem sum fidem Christianorum suscipere, et secundum legem illorum vivere' (*The Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, trans. by Riley, II, 189: 'on which her father made answer, How can that be effected, seeing that you are a pagan and he a Christian? To this his daughter made answer. Indeed I am quite ready to embrace the Christian faith and to live conformably to their laws').

²⁵ *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houdene*, ed. by Stubbs, IV, 113.

²⁶ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, pp. 221–24; Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, pp. 69–70; Knobler, 'Pseudo-Conversions and Patchwork Pedigrees'.

bly 'detained' by his hosts for three years. Even worse, this was a king who could not protect his own small kingdom against greater and stronger neighbours. Other mysteries remain, such as the text's abrupt severance in the description of the joint attack by Castile-Aragon on Navarre during Sancho's absence and its closing paragraph about Sancho's return to Navarre, and the armistice agreement he signed with the two kings. Why did the kings agree to sign with him when he returned from his prolonged sojourn in Morocco? Strangely, Sancho transformed from a persecuted exile into a restored monarch who signs a treaty with his two greatest and strongest enemies. Indeed, Nevil Barbour strongly emphasizes the clear boundaries of interreligious relationships. He writes that Sancho would not go so far as to undermine Christian solidarity for the sake of territorial expansion, even though he knows that Sancho had not hesitated to attack Castile after its defeat by the Muslims in the battle of Alarcos, and he even points out that a Castilian nobleman had fought alongside the Almohads against his own lord in that same battle.

The caliph of Morocco had a manifest interest in an alliance with the king of Navarre. In 1196, Pope Celestine appealed to Sancho to abandon his alliance with the Almohads, and he was aware that the caliph was paying Sancho not to join the Christians in their war against the Muslims. Already at that time, it was patently clear that the Muslim caliph bought off a Christian king with good money, not only to keep him from joining the Christian enemies of the caliph of Morocco but to procure his aid in attacking them. That al-Nāṣir held Sancho as military commander to help him consolidate his rule is in line with all that had long been known regarding co-operation between Christians and Muslims even prior to the activities of Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, known as *El Cid*, in Valencia. As mentioned, even after the clashes, bitter though they were, mutual contact continued, and non-aggression treaties and alliances for co-operation were signed. In 1214, for instance, Castile and the Almohads renewed their mutual non-aggression treaty, which was further extended in 1221 and was in effect until 1224.²⁷ The son and heir of al-Nāṣir, al-Mustanṣir, employed the exiled brother of the king of Portugal as a military consultant in Marrākesh.²⁸ The Almohad caliph al-Mā'mūn (r. 1227–32) went even further than that, and

²⁷ García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 65–70. On alliances between the Christians and the Almohads in the late twelfth century, see Kosto, 'Reconquest, Renaissance and Histories of Iberia', pp. 96–107.

²⁸ Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII of Navarre with the Almohads', pp. 18–19. On the rather different circumstances prevalent after Las Navas, see Lower, 'The Papacy and the Christian Mercenaries', pp. 607–13; Dufourcq, 'Les Relations du Maroc et de la Castille'.

'had claimed the throne while in the Iberian Peninsula, asked Fernando III for troops to help in conquering Marrākesh'.²⁹ Hence, that the caliph reached an agreement with Sancho regarding the frontier territories between the Muslims and the Christians along the breadth of Spain is far from implausible. The phrase 'transfer of all the Spanish Muslim territory' in Howden's text might have been misleading. Barbour takes into account the possibility of later editing of Howden's work, more than a decade after his death. He holds that, if indeed it took place, this editing gave rise to an erroneous geographical description of the territories, though not to any error concerning the essence of the agreement. He also asserts the absurdity of the second topic, that is, 'the marriage of the Muslim princess'. In an attempt to discover the source of this 'fabrication', Barbour relies in a puzzling manner on the relations of the English court with the Muslims. He distances himself from the immediate historical context of Sancho's three-year stay in the Almohad court, a fact corroborated by various Christian, as well as Muslim sources, and sets his sights on English-Muslim relations. Barbour contends that the Angevins enjoyed a special relationship with the Muslims, both in the East (Richard and Saladin) and in Spain, and points out that Henry II had threatened the pope with conversion to Islam, that thirteenth-century troubadours wrote of Eleanor of Aquitaine, duchess of Aquitaine (1122/24–1204), falling in love with Saladin, and that Eleanor herself had shown interest in Muslim love songs during her visits to Navarre and Castile. From all this, Barbour concludes that 'the royal Angevin family had a reputation for unconventional behaviour with regard to Muslims'.³⁰

We possess two pieces of evidence from other sources which would seem to anchor within historical reality Howden's comments regarding territorial

²⁹ Eisenbraun, 'Christian Success and Muslim Fear', p. 167. On the sons of the last Almohad caliph who sought refuge in Aragon, their role in Aragonese expansion through the Mediterranean, and the Almohad model of universal rule which inspired the Aragonese kings, see Fancy, 'The Last Almohads'.

³⁰ Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII of Navarre with the Almohads', pp. 19–20, suggests that Howden might have heard rumours or pieces of gossip on Sancho's marriage to a Muslim princess and may have written them down to himself. In 1213 the monks who edited his writings concerning his last days in 1201 added from their own knowledge and arranged the story as it reached us. For some reason, Barbour thought the story was romanticized in order to attract the chronicle's readers, although Howden and his editors a decade later referred to it as a historical text. Barbour thought that the motive to twist the story, that is, to refer the marriage request and the transmission of lands to the Muslims, and clear Sancho's name, had been the fact that Howden's editors knew of the 'atonement Sancho finally made when he joined the Christian forces at Las Navas'.

transfer and Sancho's marriage to a Muslim. This data allows us to glean from the text what 'actually' happened, even if it is at variance with, if not entirely opposed to the intentions of, the author at the time of its writing. Evidence that Sancho did in fact receive from the Almohads territories throughout which he could travel and from which he could collect taxes is found in the previously mentioned Latin chronicles of the kings of Castile. The geographical description in Howden's text inclines us towards reading the passage as stating that the caliph permitting Sancho to travel and cross all the frontier territories of Muslim Spain. The account of the places mentioned on the southern border of Aragon in Howden's narrative about the princess tallies with the areas described in the Castilian chronicle in conjunction with the rights of passage and the collection of tributes accorded to Sancho by al-Nāṣir in al-Andalus.

The territories specifically mentioned in Howden's text follow the length of the border between the Christian kingdoms and Muslim al-Andalus, the frontier region named *الْأَنْغَرُ الشِّمَالِي* (the northern frontier) in the Muslim sources. The presence of a Christian ally such as Sancho in this area no doubt would have proved of substantial value to al-Nāṣir.³¹ Sancho knew the rulers of Aragon and Castile and understood the lay of the land, certainly better than the caliph himself, ensconced as the caliph was in Morocco. He spoke the language of the Christians and was able to gather intelligence regarding their movements. Sancho would represent an ally of enormous importance to the caliph in the frontier regions. With regard to the territories that the caliph was purportedly willing to give to Sancho, whether for right of passage or for tribute collection, the account in the Castilian chronicle appears to reflect historical reality. This stands in marked contrast to the narrative of Roger of Howden, which refers to the caliph's intention to hand over 'all the territories of Muslim Spain' to Sancho, a description that better describes the English Crusaders' campaign on the Spanish coast.³²

The Almohads and Navarre were conjoined by the financing made possible through the allowance of tribute collection. The historical information we have today of the 'itinerant power' of the Almohads confirms this. The Almohad caliphs needed to move amongst their fiefs in order to forcefully extract the payment of tributes owed to them. That, as noted by one historian, afforded 'some indication of the political archaism of the Islamic West'.³³ Thus, the con-

³¹ This term appears in Muslim sources. See *Un recueil de lettres officielles*, ed. by Lévi Provençal, pp. 66–67.

³² Barbour, 'The Relations of King Sancho VII with the Almohads', pp. 17–19.

³³ Georges, 'Some Considerations on Almohad Itinerant Power'. See also Cressier and

ceptual and methodological similarities in rule enforcement, perhaps in common with the 'Islam-Christian civilization in the West', support the feasibility of the kind of alliance that is described in the delegation story. In other words, overlap in the administrative practices of John of England, Sancho of Navarre, and al-Nāṣir of Morocco buttresses Paris's report of John's proposed pact. While the story of Sancho's marriage has confounded substantiation, as the Muslim chronicles have preserved the story of Sancho's marriage to a Muslim princess,³⁴ we can say that there may be a grain of truth to it. Scholars have noted that the name of the queen of Navarre, derived as it is from the Arabic, supports the fact that in all probability Sancho did marry a Muslim woman.

Alfonso VIII and his ally Pedro II of Aragon, who after the Almohad invasion of al-Andalus recognized the intensity of the threat posed to their territorial achievements, turned for help to their co-religionists and their allies north of the Pyrenees. Alfonso addressed Philip Augustus directly, and the bishops in Toulouse and Provence urged the pope to take action on behalf of recruiting Christian soldiers. During the second half of 1211 and in the first months of 1212, Innocent published a series of letters in which he declared a Crusade against the infidels in Spain.³⁵ In the throes of the Albigensian Crusade, with its troops compelled to concentrate their efforts in Languedoc, and because the pope was aware of alliances between Christian and Muslim parties, and its weakening repercussions on the Christian camp, he sent written instructions to Alfonso to accede to any offer of an agreement, even temporary, by the Almohad caliph that would remove the threat of war until such time as an opportunity of certain victory presented itself to the Christians.³⁶ Innocent correctly assessed the strength of the Muslim empire and understood, even during the era of the Crusades, the value of realpolitik and diplomacy in the frontier regions, even with the greatest of Christendom's enemies. The pope knew that while the Almohads were waging jihād against the Christians, conquering and devastating some of the moderate Andalusian kingdoms, and beginning to push back the northern Christian kingdoms, the Muslims would still consider

others, *Los Almohades*, I, p. xvi.

³⁴ Fortún Pérez de Ciriza, *Sancho VII el Fuerte*; Barbour, 'The Embassy Sent by King John', pp. 375–76.

³⁵ Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 172–74. See also Hashmi, *Just Wars, Holy Wars and Jihads*.

³⁶ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, p. 229; Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 167, 172.

offers on the part of the Christians promising immediate financial gain hand-in-hand with political and strategic benefits. In the frontier region reality, at a time when the Muslim empire was calling for jihād and the Christian kingdoms were rallying for the Crusades, John, Sancho, and Alfonso, and likewise also al-Nāṣir, all shared an awareness of political and economic interests. Medieval kingdoms were apparently key players in terms of international relations, and economic and military factors were much more likely to shape political engagement than vague concepts like civilisations. As one scholar put it with respect to current Muslim-Western relations, ‘states will consort with any civilization, however alien, as long as the price is right and the goods are ready.’³⁷

As discussed in Chapter 2, the *Barnwell Chronicle* referred to the Muslims’ plan to possibly further their attacks on French territory. Al-Nāṣir had been allied for years in close bonds of friendship with one Christian kingdom, that of Navarre. This would explain, in the geopolitical reality of the summer of 1212, why he was willing to plunge a wedge into the Christian front with the assistance of yet another powerful Christian kingdom. The action was taken in order to confound the coalition constructed by Castile, to strengthen his hold on al-Andalus and to make use of all available approaches to outflank his enemies, particularly Castile, from within the Christian territories — from Navarre in the north-east and from English Gascony from the north. Had al-Nāṣir defeated Alfonso, the most likely prediction at the time, part of his forces could have reached Navarre without delay and from there move to Gascony and Aquitaine. And if the Muslims had indeed planned to deepen their penetration into north of the Pyrenees, against the king of France, the dukes and counts allies of Castile, then surely, would Gascony and Aquitaine would be used as a strategic priority asset. A look at Map 1 shows that even though the military encounter between the parties at Las Navas had taken place in the relatively southern region of Jaén, the northern border region under Muslim domination in the Iberian Peninsula at that time, passed the Tortosa — Teruel line, not far from Navarre.³⁸

³⁷ Kirk, *Civilisations in Conflict?*, p. 35 n. 26. See also Harari, *A Brief History of Mankind*, pp. 177–78: ‘On both sides rulers were happy to receive taxes in hard currency, whether the coins bore the emblem of the Cross or the inscription “There is no God but Allah”’; and see Lagardère, ‘Le gihad almohade’.

³⁸ It is approximately 100 km distance between the frontier of al-Andalus and Navarre. See Map 1 on p. xi.

The Angevins, Navarre, and the Almohads

John was not the first of the English kings to become involved in the Christian and even the Muslim politics of the Iberian kingdoms. Relations between the English royal court and the Christian and Muslim Iberian rulers can be traced back to at least the early part of the twelfth century.³⁹ As already mentioned, Petrus Alfonsi, the renowned Jewish apostate from the court of Alfonso I of Aragon, lived in England for several years and served as personal physician to Henry I, John's great-grandfather. Angevin England became directly involved in Iberian politics, mainly during the mid-twelfth century. When Henry II married Eleanor, the duchies of Aquitaine and Gascony became subject to the jurisdiction of the English Crown, and the Angevins were thrust into neighbourly relations, and sometimes even friction, along their common border, with the Pyrenean Christian princedoms and to the south, on the Iberian frontier. For instance, when the betrothal of Richard to the daughter of Ramon Berenguer IV, count of Barcelona, was annulled, Ibn Mardanišh, the Muslim ruler of Valencia and an ally of the count, dispatched compensatory gifts to Henry.⁴⁰ Henry II's daughter and John's sister, Eleanor, married Alfonso VIII of Castile in 1170, and Henry II himself was called in to act as arbitrator in a dispute between Castile and Navarre. In 1191 Richard married Berengaria, the sister of Sancho, who was to be crowned king a few years later, while Richard resided in Cyprus, on his way to the Holy Land.⁴¹ During the time when John married Isabella of Angoulême, his ambassadors were embarrassingly still in the midst of diplomatic activity to arrange his engagement to a Portuguese princess. The Angevins sought brides of royal or aristocratic extraction from the south of the Pyrenees, in order to avoid complications with the Church regarding blood kinship or with the loss of fiefdoms as a result of feudal relationships with the Capetians.⁴²

In accordance with the policy outlined by Henry II and Richard in relation to the Iberian Christian kingdoms, John also worked to promote English interests in the region. Nicholas Vincent has noted that more than those who came before on the throne of England, John was influenced in his policies in

³⁹ Mendéz González, 'Anglo-Iberian Relations'. I thank Dr Mendéz González for her advice to consider the exact phrasing of King John's treaties with Navarre.

⁴⁰ Barbour, 'The Embassy Sent by King John', p. 374.

⁴¹ See Gillingham, *Richard I*, pp. 140–46, on King Richard I's diplomatic relations with the Muslims in the East.

⁴² Martindale, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine: The Last Years'.

various spheres including legislation, constitutional structure, diplomacy, and relations with the Holy See and by developments in the north and south of the Pyrenees.⁴³ After the loss of his fiefs in northern France in 1204, John concentrated on Aquitaine and Gascony as his overseas fiefs (an issue I will discuss in more detail later). The transition in the political system in south-west Europe, and its political possibilities, with its basis of an alliance with existing regional powers such as the Almohads, strongly influenced the king. Contacts between the Christians and the Muslims on the Iberian frontier region transformed and became part of immediate English interests during John's rule, as evidenced by the delegation story and supported by historical background. Relations between John and Sancho, his third brother-in-law and brother of the queen of England, comprised a complex blend of common interests and tension. On the one hand, John sought to weaken Castile and its claims to his fiefdoms north of the Pyrenees, Gascony mainly. Already in 1170, the duchy of Gascony was apparently promised to Castile due to the marriage of Eleanor, John's sister, to Alfonso.⁴⁴ Castile and Aragon, together with Toulouse, which had been wrested from the English Crown during Richard's days, moved closer to the sphere of French influence. Admittedly, by the time the Albigensian Crusade had begun, John allied with Otto IV, who was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1209, and both rulers joined to assist Raymond, count of Toulouse, against Simon de Montfort. In September 1211, the count even succeeded in leading a counter-attack on the French forces, but during the following year, much of the province of Toulouse was captured by Catholic forces. In the summer of 1212, John had no outlook for a strong Christian ally neighbouring his continental fiefs. The mutual interests between the count of Toulouse and John were renewed only in the fall of 1212, or even later on during 1213, when forces led by King Pedro II of Aragon, came with military forces to the aid of Toulouse.

Sancho VII endured Alfonso's aggression until he was finally compelled to hide away for several years in the Almohad's court in Marrākesh under the patronage of Caliph al-Manṣūr and his son, al-Nāṣir. Finding himself isolated and threatened by powerful forces on the Iberian Peninsula and also under papal excommunication from 1198, he became close to John, holder of the duchy of Gascony, a Basque region with traditional cultural, linguistic, and social ties to Navarre, which was promised to his sister upon her marriage to Richard. John

⁴³ Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', pp. 244–45, 258; Cuttino, *English Medieval Diplomacy*, 1–24, 48–53.

⁴⁴ Vincent, 'Jean sans Terre et les origines de la Gascogne anglaise', p. 538.

and Sancho signed a series of agreements under the arbitration of Adomar, count of Angoulême and father of Queen Isabella, John's wife. The two signed a treaty on 14 October 1201, immediately upon Sancho's return from his stay with the Almohads, and renewed it on 4 February 1202.⁴⁵ Even before he lost his northern territories and before the Almohads entered the arena, John had done extraordinarily well. He created a coalition, comprising from north to south — Poitou, Angoulême, Aquitaine, Gascony, and Navarre — in order to establish control of overseas territories against Philip Augustus and his allies, the counts of Toulouse, and the kings of Aragon and Castile.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, tensions ran high between John and Sancho: the latter's sister, Berengaria, had claimed the duchy of Gascony as an inheritance. Already in 1191, Richard had promised Berengaria, his wife and the queen of England, all the lands of the duchy of Gascony in the area south of the river Garonne, a promise that had been made conditional upon the return of the territories held by Eleanor, his mother. However, not only did these promises to Berengaria remain unfulfilled for over a decade, but upon the death of Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1204, the said territories were transferred to Isabella of Angoulême, John's wife and the queen consort of England.⁴⁷ While Berengaria's renewed claim to the duchy of Gascony was ignored in England, Philip Augustus took advantage of the situation and in return for granting her the city of Le Mans, recently captured from John, coerced Berengaria into renouncing her claims to Anjou. Strong political prudence was demanded of Sancho to protect his interests in the 'Basque' areas of Gascony against strongly grounded claims from all sides: against the king of England, who held territories as the duke of Aquitaine; against the king of France, who claimed the status of feudal overlord with regard to Aquitaine and Gascony; and against Alfonso, who from 1170 had claimed title to the duchy as part of a marriage agreement with the Angevin family. Gascony was also promised, within the framework of the Le Goulet treaty of 1200, as a dowry for John's niece, Eleanor, daughter of Alfonso, for her marriage to Philip's son,

⁴⁵ Barbour, 'The Embassy Sent by King John', p. 12; Latin text: *Colección diplomática del rey Don Sancho VII*, ed. by Marichalar, pp. 62–63. In February 1202 King John received a messenger, apparently a Muslim by the name Ysmael, of the infant Constance, Sancho's sister: Rymer, *Foedera*, I, pt 1, p. 86.

⁴⁶ Map 2 on p. xii.

⁴⁷ Rymer, *Foedera*, I, pt 1, pp. 84, 94, 97, 102, 126. Vincent, 'Isabella of Angoulême: John's Jezebel', pp. 182–88. Only in 1215 did John conclude the affair with Berengaria by payment of damages. See Vincent, 'A Forgotten War'.

Louis.⁴⁸ In August 1204, after it became manifestly clear that John had no intention of transferring Gascony to Berengaria, Sancho published a letter of patronage for the residents of the city of Bayonne, the capital city of Gascony and the English Crown's most valuable possession in the Duchy. In that letter, he maintained the people of Bayonne's allegiance to John of England as their feudal lord but worked in parallel to extend Navarre's influence in practice from the north of the Pyrenees, in Gascony.⁴⁹

Papal threats and further strained relations with Sancho followed John's failure to fulfill his obligations towards Berengaria. Only late in John's reign did the parties settle the inheritance disputes and make monetary arrangements to resolve the issues at hand. These interests concerning control of Gascony may well have influenced Sancho's political relationship with John and his role as mediator between him and the Almohads leading up to the arrival of the delegation in the summer of 1212, and at the same time as one who switched to the Castilian-French camp on the very eve of the battle of Las Navas. Some knowledge of the early thirteenth-century Anglo-Navarrese treaties is indispensable to the background of the delegation story. They also help to confirm what the *Chronica majora* relates regarding John's proposition to the Almohads. Both treaties established a perpetual confederation and mutual friendship between John and Sancho VII, against all men except the king of Morocco ('excepto Miramamolin Marroccorum Rege'), who was Sancho's ally. Essentially, the treaty made the king of Morocco an ally of the king of England, and, importantly, it was coupled chronologically with Sancho's return from Morocco.⁵⁰

John was well aware that Navarre had a strong ally in al-Andalus in the person of the caliph of Morocco, and in fact as early as 1202 there existed a link between him and the Almohad caliph by way of the treaty with Navarre. In 1202 and again in 1212, the Navarrese was at risk of losing his kingdom to either Castile or Aragon, with which he was at war. As for John, the treaty con-

⁴⁸ *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houdene*, ed. by Stubbs, IV, 150; *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*, ed. by Desamparados Cabañes Pecourt, pp. 36–38. In November 1201 King John issued a chart forbidding the citizens of Bayonne to hold intercourse with the subjects of the King of Castile, and in February 1202, John signed a treaty with Sancho of Navarre against the kings of Castile and Anjou. See Rymer, *Foedera*, I, pt 1, pp. 85, 86.

⁴⁹ Vincent, 'Isabella of Angoulême: John's Jezebel', p. 188 n. 76; Vincent, 'Jean sans Terre et les origines de la Gascogne anglaise', pp. 539–40. See the reference in the Latin text to King John: *Colección diplomática del rey Don Sancho VII*, ed. by Marichalar, pp. 69–70.

⁵⁰ Rymer, *Foedera*, I, pt 1, p. 80. On similar exclusive treaties, see Pascua, 'South of the Pyrenees', pp. 112–14.

stituted his only hope of recruiting some help to save Gascony. In the summer of 1212, John organized alliances, which included the counts of Flanders and Boulogne, Emperor Otto IV, and the duke of Limbourg and in the south, his ally in Navarre, Sancho VII, and to all accounts, Raymond, count of Toulouse. The securing of his lands on the borders of Spain by reliance on a forceful ally such as the Almohads would have allowed John to better address the northern front and subsequently increase his chances of successfully confronting Philip Augustus. Geopolitical conditions in 1212, however, were completely different from those in 1202. In 1212, the Almohad caliph was present in the region of the Iberian frontier. Then, when Navarre became a territory through which the Muslims could cross through the Pyrenees and then over to John's territories, and when Sancho stood to benefit from a Muslim victory over his neighbours, the idea as well as the relevance of negotiations between the English and the Almohads was quite plausible, and John might well have sent a diplomatic mission to that ruler who had already been his indirect ally, the Almohad caliph. Adam Kosto points out what is lost in a too-neat picture of the Reconquest with respect to the Iberian Peninsula. What comes across is King John's participation as an 'outsider', to use Kosto's words, is an important testimony to the broadening of 'a common pattern throughout the peninsula, a pulsation of consolidation, disintegration, and recombination of political units on either side of a conceptual frontier that more often than not may not have existed'.⁵¹ Indeed, delegations on behalf of northern Europeans had visited Muslim courts even long before. For instance, already in the mid-tenth century, in the framework of less comfortable geopolitical conditions than those enjoyed by John and al-Nāṣir, Otto I of Germany had sent a delegation to the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān.

In his recent book on the battle of Las Navas, historian Francisco García Fitz argues that by 1207, Castile and Navarre had already resolved their conflicts. On the eve of the confrontation between the Muslim and the Christian coalitions in the summer of 1212, Sancho was, accordingly, in a position of 'neutrality'. Then, bowing to pontifical pressure, he shifted allegiances and at the

⁵¹ Gillingham argued with respect to the English alliances of 1202, that 'Sancho VII of Navarre was the prince who was least likely to be able to help him in the coming struggle', see *The Angevin Empire*, p. 75. Recently, Adam J. Kosto refers to alliances between Muslims and Christians in the Iberian Peninsula and argues that 'Outsiders could easily get on in this act, further evidence of the flexibility of the political situation: in 1211, the Almohad caliph met in Seville with an ambassador of King John of England, who was hoping for a military alliance to distract the French'; Kosto, 'Reconquest, Renaissance and the Histories of Iberia', p. 99 n. 41.

last minute joined the Christian camp. A different picture emerges, however, from the Muslim and some of the Christian sources. These reports indicate that Sancho was not a supporting actor, observing the action from the wings. In the summer of 1212, the agreement that he and Alfonso signed in October 1207 had in fact expired. At the same time, Sancho was still an ally of the Almohads and was aligned with them by binding agreements and contracts.⁵² Sancho's conduct on the eve of the battle seemed quite deliberate, and it may well have had an impact on the results of the conflict. Al-Nāṣir, who during the spring of 1212 moved forward toward the Christian border, left Seville on 3 June.⁵³ In the Muslim chronicle *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, written in the beginning of the fourteenth century, historian Ibn Abī Zar' had apparently written about two Christian delegations that visited the caliph al-Nāṣir in Seville during the time in which he dwelled in the city.⁵⁴ Barbour, who makes a serious scholarly effort to consult Muslim sources that might support Paris's report, writes that in the larger part of the existing manuscripts of that chronicle, the Christian ruler is called the 'king of Bayonne (*bayūna*)'.⁵⁵ Scholars believed that the king in question was the king of Pamplona, as Arab sources referred to the king of Navarre. But, as was well known, Bayonne was the main city of the English fiefs in Gascony, the neighbouring duchy, bordering in Navarre. Barbour raises the possibility that since it would be quite reasonable to expect an Arab chronicler to address the king of England as 'king of Bayūna' as different than the familiar, Navarrese 'king of Pamplona', it is entirely possible that the Arab chronicle may have been

⁵² García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 145–47 does not consider the fact that Sancho was an ally of the Almohads. He suggests that 'for the Navarrese, the logical action in these circumstances would have been to stay out and wait for the course of events'. On the contrary, the Muslim chronicler was quite precise. See Huici Miranda, *Al Bayān Al Mugrib*, II, 271. See also Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England*, p. 14 n. 9: 'The "king of the Moroccans" was the Almohad sultan whom Sancho deserted in 1212.'

⁵³ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa*, pp. 80–86.

⁵⁴ *Roudh el-Kartas*, ed. by Beaumier, pp. 332–36.

⁵⁵ روض القرطاس، ابن أبي زرع، فاقام بها واهتزت جميع بلاد الروم بجوازها، ووقع خوفه في قلوب ملوكهم، وأخذوا في تخصيص بلادهم وأخلاء ما قرب من لمسلمين من قراهم وحصونهم، وكتب اليه أكثر أمراءهم يسألون سلامته ويطلبون منه عفوهم، وجاءه منهم ملك بيونه مستسلما خاضعا مستصغرا يطلب صلجه ويسأل منه عفوهم وصفحة Ben Mansour, *Ali ibn-abi-zar, Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, p. 309: 'And he stayed there (in Seville) and all the lands of the Christians were shaken under his licence, and he threw down fear in the hearts of their kings, and they started fortifying their lands and they evacuated villages and castles close to the Muslims, and many of their princes have written to him asking him for safety and forgiveness, and the king of Bayona came to him submissive, subordinate, belittled, requesting his peace and asking him amnesty and forgiveness.'

referring to two delegations, the first of an ambassador and the second royal — the king himself. He noted some remaining difficulties, the most blatant being that *al-Qirṭās* calls the second mission 'royal'. Barbour explains the confusion by asserting that 'an embassy from King John, arranged by King Sancho's good offices, arrived first and was shortly followed by King Sancho in person'.⁵⁶

The changes of transcription in the manuscripts do not stand alone. To Barbour's theory may now be added the detailed description in Abī Zar's chronicle of the entrance of this 'king of Bayonne', apparently an ambassador on his behalf into al-Andalus in the summer of 1212. This description does not accord with the nature of the relationship between Sancho and al-Nāṣir as already familiar to us from the various Christian and Muslim chronicles. Ibn Abī Zar' describes the Christian king as terrified, one who required tight protection, and the Muslim caliph as helpless with respect to manners and language in which to receive the stranger. This information is totally inconsistent with the long-standing familiarity and friendship between the two rulers.⁵⁷ In these relations, whether between the rulers themselves or between emissaries they sent regularly to each other, much weight was given to their being familiar with each others cultures. Being versed in Islamic culture was of great advantage for gaining access to and negotiating with Muslim figures of power, and vice versa.⁵⁸ Sancho, who spent almost three years in the Almohad court, was probably intimately acquainted with Almohad habits.

The Ibn Abī Zar' description, however, is more in line with what we know about the relationship between John and the Almohads, or about an ambassador standing at the head of an English delegation, unaccustomed to the

⁵⁶ Barbour, 'The Embassy Sent by King John', p. 380, and his 'Two Christian Embassies'. A more detailed discussion of the change of names 'Pamplona' and 'Bayonne' in Arabic transcript is followed by Huici Miranda. It is worth noting, however, that the script 'Bayona' occurs again in the text and does not change to Banbaluna. Furthermore, the chronicle *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* describes the Navarrese king's visit on the eve of the battle on Salvatierra, and therefore dates it to June 1211. It infers that al-Nāṣir met with the king of Pamplona for the first time, an untenable argument, since Sancho had already met with the caliph a decade earlier. More reliable Muslim sources, the contemporaneous al Marrkushī and *al Rawḍ al-Mi'tar*, recall June 1212 as the date of the visit. See Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, pp. 232–52.

⁵⁷ Ibn Abī Zar' el-Faṣī, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, ed. by Huici Miranda, II, 457–60; روض القرطاس 2002, ابن أبي زرع, 'فخرج هذا اللعين من قاعده ملكه بيونه قاصدا ودخيلا الي امير المؤمنين' pp. 309–11. 'Ali Ibn-Abi-Zar, *Rawḍ el-qirṭās*, ed. by Ben Mansour, , p. 310, 'and that cursed one left the seat of his throne Bayona as an envoy a stranger to the caliph'.

⁵⁸ Decter, 'Before Caliphs and Kings', p. 17.

manners of the Muslims. Ibn Abī Zar‘ writes at length of ‘the use of military display to impress his visitors and his careful arrangements of the setting in which he received them’, a description Barbour has already observed is in exceptional agreement with Paris’s. Abī Zar‘ adds that the caliph arranged for the Christian king great honours, gave him large presents and signed with him and his descendants eternal peace, such is the Arabic text, ‘for as long as the dynasty lasted’: *وصالحه صلحا مؤبدا ما دامت مدة الموحدين، ثم صرفه إلى بلاده مكرما مسعفا بجميع مطالبه* (and he signed him perpetual peace as long as the Almohad period lasted, then he sent him to his land, respected, assisted with his requests).⁵⁹ This formulation of the alliance is reminiscent of the alliance between Navarre and the Almohads, through which John, as we recall, had become already in 1202 an ally of the Muslims. Reports in the Muslim chronicle of a visit by a king of Bayonne, read as ‘on behalf of the king of Bayonne’, which indeed ended in a written agreement between England and the Almohads, is consistent with the suggested reading of Paris’s text and fits into the wider historical geopolitical context. This is true both in terms of the indirect political relationship that actually took place between John and al-Nāṣir in the form of the 1202 Anglo-Navarrese pact, and with regard to the ripening of mutual interests of England and Morocco, during the specific period from the beginning of June until the middle of July 1212. The treaty between Sancho and the caliph remained intact until one week before the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, when the former decided to switch allegiances.

Sancho VII, the Battle of Las Navas, and the English Delegation to the Almohads

A lively historiographical debate concerns whether or not the encounter of Las Navas was a decisive battle, a turning point in the history of the Iberian kingdoms, in the history of the Almohad Empire or in Western European and Islamic history in general. Contemporary chroniclers and modern historians, who discuss political relations between Christians and Muslims in the context of the *Reconquista*, consider the encounter at Las Navas to be a critical transition, whose effect was clear even far from the frontier itself.⁶⁰ Both contemporaries and later generations have subsequently referred to the encounter in almost mythic proportions.⁶¹

⁵⁹ ابن أبي زرع، *روض القرطاس*، ص. 307–311.

⁶⁰ Ray, ‘Between the Straits’.

⁶¹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 537–46; García Fitz, ‘Las Navas de Tolosa’, pp. 50, 61;

Contemporary observers of the battle, especially those on the victorious side, were already aware of its significance. The Christian chronicles and the royal records of the Iberian kingdoms treated the confrontation with the Muslims and the vanquishing of the caliph of Morocco as having a more comprehensive impact and a greater importance than other battles. The chronicler Archbishop Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, who wrote about three decades after the battle, explicitly attributed the collapse of the Almohads' power to the result of the battle at Las Navas, and chroniclers of the latter part of the thirteenth century have even linked the results of the battle to the end of the Muslim presence in al-Andalus altogether.⁶² Even some of the Muslim chronicles speak of the results of the battle *Ḥisn al-'Iqāb* as being directly related to the end of the reign of the caliph al-Nāṣir, the decline of the Almohads, and the loss of its grip on al-Andalus. Al-Makkarī, while writing in hindsight, went as far as attributing to the battle the beginning of the overall decline of Islam in the West.⁶³

Modern historians, too, have understood the confrontation at Las Navas in the context of major transformations of the Iberian Peninsula and the Maghreb. This is how Francisco García Fitz describes it when he writes: 'y marcaría el final de una época y los inicios de otra nueva en las relaciones entre al Andalus y los reinos cristianos' (and it marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new one in relations between al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms), though he, too, has recently moderated this assertion.⁶⁴ Simultaneously, historians have pointed out the implications of the event on the Iberian Christian kingdoms

Alvira Cabrer, 'Las Navas de Tolosa'; Fromherz, 'Making Great Battles Great'; O'Connor, 'The Fall of the Almohad Empire'. On Pope Innocent III's view of the battle, see Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 158–59.

⁶² García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 51–52.

⁶³ Ibn Abī Zar' al-Fasī, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, ed. by Huici Miranda, II, 537; Al-Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-mu'jib*, trans. by Dozy, p. 227 المعجب في تلخيص أخبار المغرب: فكانت هذه أشد علي المسلمين من الهزيمة ولم يزل أمير المؤمنين أبو عبد الله مقيما بمراكش بقية سنة 9 واشهرها من سنة 10 إلى أن توفي في شهر شعبان كما قدمنا وأختلف علينا في سبب وفاته (And this defeat was the gravest for the Muslims and the caliph Abu abdAllah did not last in Marrakesh but for the rest of the ninth year and a few months of the tenth year till his death in the month of Shu'ban, as we have said, and we have disagreed on the circumstances of his death). See also the fourteenth-century anonymous chronicler of *Al-Hulal al Mawsīya*, ed. by Huici Miranda, I, 'Crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín, traducción española', p. 190. On al-Makkarī, see García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa', p. 54.

⁶⁴ García Fitz, *Castilla y León frente al Islam*, p. 310; Burési, *La frontière entre chrétienté et Islam*; García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa, ¿un punto de inflexión en las dinámicas históricas peninsulares?' p. 67.

and Europe in general.⁶⁵ Some have argued that this confrontation deservedly ranks among the period's decisive battles that constructed, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, the European powers and political spaces that would survive up until the present day.⁶⁶ The Muslims' defeat at Las Navas in 1212, in the view of some historians, coupled with the results of the battle of Muret in 1213 and to those in Bouvins in 1214. These latter battles brought about a sharp change in the European geopolitical reality. Already in the mid-twentieth century Yves Renouard called attention to the geopolitical reality at the beginning of the thirteenth century that marked, as he perceived it, the onset of reality nowadays. Historians today incline, perhaps overly much, toward the discourse of 'War of Civilizations', influenced by this far-reaching view. The results of the battle of Las Navas, alongside the other battles mentioned, in their view formed a Christian Western Europe that was divided into three well-defined areas: the English kingdom north of the Channel, the kingdom of France between the Channel and the Pyrenees, and the Iberian kingdoms south of the Pyrenees.⁶⁷ Within a relatively short time, a very different era began in European history. Trends toward Catholic European unity against the enemies from within and abroad were strengthened, the Capetian kingdom fulfilled its objectives in the south up to the Pyrenees, Aragon-Catalonia turned southward and westward towards the Mediterranean, encouraging, in the process, Genoese commercial activities, and the Islamic presence in the form of the Almohads nearly disappeared.⁶⁸ Some historians criticize the over-valuation of the historical event in Las Navas, and question the impact of that outcome on the Almohad Empire, on Islam in the West, on the Christians in the Iberian kingdoms, on the *Reconquista*, and on the relationship between the Christians and the Muslims.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, in view of the political situation and the arrangement of immedi-

⁶⁵ Contemporary historians point out the battle of Muret in 1213, as yet another decisive event which influenced future Iberian politics: García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 55–58. On 1212 as 'a year of marvels', see Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', pp. 253–54. See also Gómez-Rivas, 'Las Navas de Tolosa'.

⁶⁶ Ramírez Vaquero, 'Presentación', pp. 9–10.

⁶⁷ Renouard, '1212–1216 : Comment les traits durables de l'Europe occidentale moderne'. See Map 3, p. xiii.

⁶⁸ Ruiz-Domènec, 'El significado histórico de la batalla de Las Navas de Tolosa y sus consecuencias', pp. 587–88; Reilly, 'Las Navas de Tolosa and the Changing Balance of Power'.

⁶⁹ García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 66–68; Alvira Cabrer, 'Después de Las Navas de Tolosa y antes de Bouvines'; Smith, 'Las Navas and the Restoration of Spain'; Smith, 'Soli hispani?'; Tolan, 'Réactions chrétiennes aux conquêtes musulmanes'.

ate alliances, it indeed seems that the battle results sharply changed the frontier region. From the point of view of the Christians, the Muslim threat of attack was removed in a split second. Perhaps on a larger scale, south-west Christian Europe, which in May 1212 stood ready for expeditions of war and occupation, found in late July that the situation was completely different. However, no hint of the geopolitical reality that would be created by the battle of Las Navas was perceptible in the months and weeks preceding the conflict, and under which Paris incorporated the delegation story into his *Chronica majora*. Contemporary observers, as well as modern historians, predicted precisely the opposite scenario: that the Iberian Peninsula would have passed into Islamic control, that in France the Capetians would have been ruling a sharply reduced kingdom, and that an Atlantic empire under Plantagenet rule would extend on both sides of the Channel.⁷⁰

A review of the geopolitical reality that preceded the conflict, when in May 1212 there were two formidable forces, from the south to the Pyrenees and to the west of La Manche Channel with common enemies and interests, reverses the conventional questions about Paris's delegation story. No longer do we wonder about the multitude of facts found in the story. As it emerges from the Christian sources available to Paris, there was a very real threat of widespread Muslim expansion. During the period in which the Christians suffered serious defeats, in the battle of Hattin in the East and in the battle of Alarcos in the West, a fear of the 'uncontainable advance of Islam' spread through Catholic Europe.⁷¹ Christian forces were organized in the wider framework of *Reconquista* and Crusade in order to recruit into the coming encounter as many forces as possible from all over Western Europe, backed with justification and reinforced with the proper incentive. From Muslim sources and from evidence regarding the military activities taken by al-Nāṣir, it emerges that the Almohads clearly intended to unite al-Andalus under their rule. Having succeeded in retaining the authority of the central government in North Africa, the caliph sought to bring an end to the isolationism of the Andalusian Taifa kingdoms who conducted their affairs independently. From the Muslim side as well, there was a call for a holy war, jihād. This constituted the organizing structure for the encounter. A central ideology from the Almohad's earliest days, the call for jihād against non-believers served to solidify the warriors' commitment to the battle.⁷²

⁷⁰ García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 59–60.

⁷¹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, p. 128; Alvira Cabrer, 'De Alarcos a Las Navas de Tolosa'.

⁷² García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 107, 462–73; Lagradère, 'Le gihad almohade: théorie

It is difficult to trace in the Muslim sources clear evidence of a specific intent of the Almohads to widen the conflict with the Christians to beyond the borders of Spain, or beyond the territory they called al-Andalus. However, we can point to actions which may indicate the dimensions of preparation for the conflict. Among these may be included the large naval raid conducted by the Almohads in 1210 against Barcelona;⁷³ the recruiting of the massive forces raised by Caliph al-Nāṣir upon arrival in Spain;⁷⁴ and the oath attributed to him after the conquest of Salvatierra to eliminate all Iberian Christian kings.⁷⁵ Along with this, Muslim sources also preserved evidence of the palpable fear that spread across the Christian side, of a wider Muslim attack whose goal was beyond the Pyrenees.⁷⁶ The evidence for such intentions on the Almohad's part seems weak. It might even be worth considering from the caliph's perspective: why would he want to cross over into southern France? Had any Almohad ruler considered doing anything like that before? Whether or not the Muslims intended to penetrate more pervasively into Western Europe, it seems that these rumours on the Christian side operated for their best interests in the background of the upcoming conflict. Paris provides in his delegation story clear evidence of Christian concern regarding the Muslims encroaching beyond the Pyrenees. And Paris, in turn, seems to have relied on the *Barnwell Chronicle* and possibly other information about which it is difficult to determine a direct connection, but that was circulating in Europe. Indeed, the writing reflects the atmosphere of the eve of the confrontation on the side of the Christians. The mobilization of north European forces for the confrontation with the Muslims, attests the widespread estimations on the Christian side as to the nature of the danger to the Iberian kingdoms and, beyond that, to Western Europe in general. A letter which was attributed to the caliph al-Nāṣir contained a threat on his part to fight the king of Aragon and the pope himself. The intention of the Almohads, according to a report which appeared in the *Continuatio Lambacensis* (*The Annals of Lambach of Austria*), had been to continue to fight

et pratique', pp. 617–31. Alvira Cabrer, 'El Desafío del Miramamolín'; and Alvira Cabrer, 'La imagen del Miramamolín al-Nāṣir (1199–1213)'; Fletcher, 'Reconquest and Crusade in Spain, ca. 1050–1150'.

⁷³ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, p. 228.

⁷⁴ Lapidra Gutiérrez, 'Christian Participation in Almohad Armies and Personal Guards'; García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 265–88.

⁷⁵ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, p. 249.

⁷⁶ البيان المغرب في أخبار الأندلس والمغرب لابن عذاري المراكشي. قسم الموحدين، تحقيق محمد الكتاني (بيروت، 1948)، ص. 263.

in the Christian areas until they reached Rome, where they would bring a bitter defeat to the pope. Sicard of Cremona, a chronicler who wrote about a year after the events, stated that the Mauritanian king, who entered Spain with an endless number of warlike saracens, threatened to conquer not only Spain but also Rome and all of Europe itself.⁷⁷ This propaganda, as a modern historian has claimed, surely reached the ears of Innocent, and it is only reasonable that Paris found references to it in his sources.⁷⁸

When Paris wrote about the caliph intending to reach 'the borders of Spain with John's consent', he documented precisely the rumour-filled atmosphere prevailing at the time. And if it was indeed the Almohad's intention to cross the 'borders of Spain', then according to Paris, John had prepared extremely well for this exigency. In the negotiations that took place between the parties, John gave his approval, so that the Muslims could cross through his fiefs that bordered Spain, protect them as an ally of England, and direct their attack against the coalition headed by France. Paris seems to have preserved testimony that John had also been aware of the rumours and suspicion that were circulating around Western Europe. Though these rumours might have been groundless, John could not have had definite knowledge of the Almohad's plans. Whether John knew about a concrete Muslim plan to cross the Pyrenees, or he was only a partner to the general concern that something like this would happen, he is depicted as a ruler who would exhaust all means to promote his interests and

⁷⁷ Sicardi Cremonensis, *Chronicon*, col. 538: 'Eodem anno scilicet 1212, Almeramomeley rex Mauritanus veniens in Hispanias cum infinita multitudo Sarracenorum minabatur non solum Hispaniam, sed et Romam, imo Europam capere universam.' Such information appears later in an account of events leading up to the battle of Las Navas, written by Bernat Desclot, in his chronicle of the reign of King Pedro III of Aragon. See Bird, Peters, and Powell, *Crusade and Christendom*, no. 9: 'The battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, 1212', pp. 85–94: 'And this Saracen, Miramamolin, held a council with his wise men and told them that he had in mind to cross over into the land of Spain with all his hosts and to drive out the Christians from it, for it seemed to him that with his army he could conquer all of Christendom. And his councillors and chieftains agreed with that which he said and answered that he had spoken well and had made a good resolution, for there were more warriors in the fourth part of his dominions than in all the lands of the Christians. And so this Miramamolin made ready to cross over into Spain and sent his messengers throughout all his lands to all that knew how to wield arms, summoning them to cross over with him into Spain, for he desired to drive all the Christians out of Spain and to conquer all Rome.'

⁷⁸ Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', p. 176. See also García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 126–29.

prepare his territories toward the expected military developments on the eve of the confrontation.

Up until 1207, the Almohads succeeded in strengthening their hold on all parts of the empire, from Tunis to Majorca. Their takeover of Majorca, which remained for years as an outpost of the Almoravids, far from the centre of the government, raised concerns among the Christians. However, the massive Muslim presence in the frontier region, starting from the spring of 1211, became progressively more threatening. Their advance had been rapid and successful. Starting from the time of their invasion of al-Andalus on 16 May 1211 until the conquering of Salvatierra before 13 September of the same year, the Almohads laid siege to Calatrava on 27 June 1212 and conquered the city on 1 July.

Castile and Aragon had called for assistance in Europe from the beginning of the Almohad's invasion through the whole second half of 1211. Only after much deliberation did Innocent respond. He announced, in a series of epistles sent as from the beginning of January 1212 onwards to the heads of the churches in Europe, a crusade of great proportions.⁷⁹ One of the central problems that troubled Castile — a problem which the pope attempted to resolve under pressure from King Alfonso — regarded the isolationist stance taken by the kingdoms of León and Navarre, and their relationship with the Muslims. These kingdoms had either existing political ties with Muslims or the potential for arrangements with them in case of war. Innocent used the full measure of his spiritual strength as well as his diplomatic acumen to create a unified Christian front and to prevent the co-operation of Christians with Muslims.⁸⁰ Pedro II of Aragon was a stalwart ally of Alfonso at the time, and thus the possibility of collaboration between John and Pedro became relevant only with a change in the political conditions after the defeat of the Almohads in Las Navas in the autumn of 1212.⁸¹ Evidence points to a special and pivotal significance of the encounter of Las Navas to Navarre and its king. The Christian chronicles refer to Sancho's reversal on the eve of battle, and describe the relatively small number of knights he had sent onto the battlefield.⁸² Muslim chronicles even

⁷⁹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 139–43; Gómez, 'Las Navas de Tolosa and the Culture of Crusade in the Kingdom of Castile'.

⁸⁰ Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 170–78.

⁸¹ Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', pp. 253–55; Estepa, 'Alfonso VIII and Las Navas de Tolosa'.

⁸² García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 482–86.

attributed the defeat of al-Nāṣir in the battle with the Christians, dated 14–16 July 1212, to treachery against the Muslims by a Christian ally of his.⁸³

In al-Marrākushī's *al Bayān al-Mughrib* of a contemporaneous observer, it is recorded that al-Nāṣir had sent a letter after the battle to his officials in which he recounted the defeat and related it to the king of Navarre, who was an ally of the Almohads by treaty but who succumbed to the threats of the pope and joined their camp.⁸⁴

Ibn Khaldūn, whose writings are based on reliable sources, provides us with some especially interesting evidence in this regard.⁸⁵ He tells of a secret agreement between Alfonso VIII of Castile and his cousin 'the king of León', according to which the latter was to feign friendship towards al-Nāṣir and act as his ally, and then disappear at the last minute. And it was this, according to Ibn Khaldūn, that brought about the rout of al-Nāṣir in the battle of *al-ʿIqāb*.⁸⁶ It appears that Ibn Khaldūn's report which referred to Alfonso's cousin, that same 'king of León', records two decisive features of the battle of Las Navas, namely, the element of surprise that gave the Christian forces a significant advantage and, in effect, victory in the battle, and the element of deception led by al-Nāṣir's ally from among the Christians. By referring to the deception of the 'king of León', Ibn Khaldūn likely intended none other than Sancho of Navarre, who was Alfonso IX, king of León's grandson. Alfonso IX of León, it is to be

⁸³ *Christians and Moors in Spain*, ed. by Melville, and Ubaydli, III: *Arabic Sources (711–1501)*, pp. 138–41, no. 102, The Muslim disaster at Las Navas de Tolosa (609/1212): Al Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-muʿjib*, ed. by Dozy, pp. 401–03; وثبت أبو عبد الله هذا في ذلك اليوم ثباتا لم ير لملك قبله، ولو لا ثباته هذا لاستصلت تلك الجموع كلها قتلا وأسرا ثم رجع من هذا الوجه إلى إشبيلية، وأقام بها إلى شهر رمضان من هذه السنة، ثم عبر البحر قاصدا مدينة مراکش... وكانت هذه الهزيمة الكبرى على المسلمين، يوم الاثنين منتصف صفر الكائن في 609 (The battle of al-ʿIqab and the defeat of the Muslims: this Abu ʿAbd-Allah stood firm on that day like no king before him; were it not for his steadfastness, the whole of that army would have been exterminated, either killed or captured. He then returned to Seville and remained there till Ramaḍān [January 1213], when he crossed over to Marrākesh [...]). This great defeat of the Muslims took place on the Monday in mid-Safar 609 [14 Safar = 16 July]).

⁸⁴ البيان المغرب في أخبار الأندلس والمغرب، ص. 261: "وقد وافاهم من رومة رسول إلههم الأرضي الذي له يسجدون وإياه يعبدون يأمر باتفاقهم، وخلع بعدهم ما بقي من شروط الموحدين في إغناهم، ومن نكت فإنما ينكت على نفسه وشرط الله أوثق"; ص. 264: وكان صاحب نبرة متعلقا من الموحدين بزمان، ومنقادا إليهم أبدا في أسمح زمان، فسقط عليه صاحب رومة إن لم يكن لقومه معسكرا ولسواد ملته مكثرا [...]

⁸⁵ Brett, 'The Lamp of the Almohads Illumination as a Political Idea', pp. 17–19.

⁸⁶ Al-Makkari, *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, trans. by De Gayangos, II, Appendix 4, p. lxviii.

noted, did not take part in the Christian coalition and did not co-operate with the Almohads at the time of the confrontation in Las Navas.⁸⁷

Modern historians have highlighted the fact that the battle of Las Navas took place in an open field. This form of warfare was exceptionally unusual in the medieval context and has always left an imprint in the history of societies involved in such confrontations. The conflict was also uncharacteristic in terms of the dimensions of scale of the forces of the recruits and the dimensions of the resources required to support those forces.⁸⁸ The Christians took an unprecedented level of risk in their offensive strategy. Scholars have pointed out that such campaign management necessitated, perhaps more than anything else, precise military intelligence concerning the movements and intentions of the opponent.⁸⁹ In light of the situation on the eve of battle, we might consider the possibility that Sancho was the source of the intelligence about the Muslims' military plans, and it is also possible that Sancho was required to deceive the Almohads in exchange for being permitted to join the Christian camp. Sancho's close ties with al-Nāṣir might well not have allowed for the Christian alliance to settle for less proof of loyalty than this. As mentioned, the pope placed strong pressure on Christian rulers who were found on friendly terms with the Muslims. The Muslim chronicles genuinely reflect the last-minute about-face of the king of Navarre as a consequence of papal pressure. Innocent accurately judged the crucial weight of unity or division in the Christian camp, and even perhaps Sancho's role in Castile's chances to lead the camp to victory over the Muslims, and he accordingly expended a great deal of effort publicizing the issue during the first half of 1212. However, in view of Sancho's rejection of the

⁸⁷ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, p. 148, pointed out that Alfonso IX of Leon remained neutral and in fact could not resist the opportunity to attack Castile during the confrontation with the Almohads. However, neither Ibn Khaldūn nor other Muslim chroniclers refer to the king of Leon as ally of the Almohads.

⁸⁸ García Fitz, *Castilla y León frente al Islam*, pp. 279–82, pp. 288–90; García Fitz, 'Las Navas de Tolosa', pp. 60–66.

⁸⁹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 82–87: 'Llevar a cabo una operación como ésta requería necesariamente una información previa más o menos precisa sobre los movimientos y dirección de los adversarios, con suficiente antelación como para convocar las fuerzas propias y trasladarlas a la frontera, hasta el lugar por donde se advinaba que los enemigos iniciarían sus ataques' ('To carry out an operation like this required prior information necessarily more or less precise on the movement and direction of the opponents, early enough to gather one's own forces and move them to the border, to the place where he guessed that the enemies would initiate their attacks').

overture of the archbishop of Narbonne, who paid him a visit on his way south, other explanations for his abrupt reversal might be entertained.⁹⁰

Again, Sancho's interest in Gascony stands as one possibility. Perhaps, too, Sancho, active as he was on several political and diplomatic fronts concurrently, simply reneged at the last minute, favouring the course which appeared to offer him the most profitable prospects.⁹¹ Just prior to the battle at Las Navas, some of the Christian fighting forces withdrew from the alliance with Castile. The Frankish knights' departure and their return northwards from their camp in Toledo is also reported by Amaury, archbishop of Narbonne, and derives from the diametrically differing perceptions of the Christians north of the Pyrenees with regard to the treatment of defeated Muslims as opposed to the Iberian Christians who were accustomed to the realities of the frontier.⁹² While the northern knights demanded the slaughter of the Muslims and the looting of their belongings, the Iberians wished to follow their centuries-long custom of showing respect to those who surrendered and allowing their continued presence in their lands, under Christian rule, which also accorded with economic interests. An echo of debate within the Christian camp concerning these differing attitudes toward the Muslims can also be heard in the Muslim chronicles.⁹³ This capitulation by the northern Christians likely pushed Alfonso not only to curb his hostility towards Sancho but also to woo him, to guarantee him territorial concessions. As mentioned, by 1212 the agreement which the

⁹⁰ Smith, 'The Papacy, the Spanish Kingdoms and Las Navas de Tolosa', p. 176, emphasizes Innocent III's concern with how Alfonso IX of Leon would behave, rather than a concern about Sancho VII.

⁹¹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 146–47.

⁹² *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*, ed. by Desamparados Cabañes Pecourt, pp. 44–45. See Shoval, *Jews and Muslims as 'Servi regis'*, pp. 72–76; Alvira Cabrer, 'Rebeldes y herejes vencidos'; Gómez, 'The Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa'.

⁹³ Al Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-mu'jib*, trans. by Dozy, p. 236, كتاب المعجب في تلخيص أخبار المغرب, "وخرج الدفنس لعنه الله من مدينة طليطلة في جموع صخمه حتي نزل علي قلعة رباح وهي كانت للمسلمين إفتحها المنصور أبو يوسف في الوقعة الكبرى فسلموا اليه المسلمون الذين بها بعد أن أمنهم علي أنفسهم فرجع عن الأدفنس لعنه الله بهذا السبب من الروم جموع كثيره حين منعهم من قتل المسلمون الذين كانوا بالقلعة المذكورة وقالوا أنها جئت بنا لتفتح بنا البلاد وتمنعنا من الغزو وقتل المسلمين ما لنا في صحبتك من حاجة علي هذا الوجه (Alfonso left the city of Toledo with enormous forces, until he reached the fortress of Ribah, which belonged to the Muslims, conquered by Almansur Abu Yusuf in the great battle; and the Muslims who were there handed it to him after he had secured them; and many forces have left Alfonso for this reason for he prevented them from killing the Muslims who were in the mentioned fortress; and they said you have summoned us in order to conquer the land and you deprive us from raid and slaughter of the Muslims; what need is there for us in your company).

two kings signed five years earlier in Guadalajara had expired, and the dispute resurfaced. Perhaps, then, Alfonso decided to recruit whoever might be able to start a war against him and may have had knowledge of the Muslim war plans, thus holding the key to their defeat. And indeed, the Latin chronicle of the kings of Castile link Sancho's switch to Alfonso's decision just before the encounter in Las Navas to return to the king of Navarre for the aid that had been annexed in Castile.⁹⁴ Then, too, the absence of real military aid to Navarre on the part of the Almohads may have been decisive. The chronicle of the kings of Castile does record, as I have mentioned, financial assistance given by the Almohads to Navarre, both in the form of direct payments and by way of the transfer of fiefs in Valencia from which Sancho collected taxes. But in the years during which the king of Navarre was an ally of the Almohads, between 1195 and 1212, the Almohads never once provided military assistance to the king of Navarre. Roger of Howden, who had a relatively good grasp of the relationship between the Almohads and Navarre, noticed the significance of this issue and wrote that because al-Nāṣir needed to suppress a rebellion in Majorca in 1204, he was unable to move military forces to his ally, Sancho.⁹⁵ However, it is more likely that Sancho's failure to extract from the Almohads a promise of military assistance on the one hand, and the postponement of his English ally attack on the other, was a core consideration concerning the joining of the Christian camp. Sancho may not have wanted to risk getting caught in the same situation in which he found himself after the battle of Alarcos in 1195 and after the agreements that were signed in its footsteps between his enemies the Christians and his allies the Almohads. No doubt, Sancho acted throughout the encounter for his interests and his kingdom. Various considerations convinced him at the last moment that he would derive greater benefit from joining the Christian coalition than he would from an alliance with the Muslims and the English. Nonetheless, up until very close to the military encounter, probably a week before, circumstances were still different. According to the geopolitical conjuncture, and the prospect of affairs, Sancho, John, and al-Nāṣir together wove the possibility of a strategic political and military alliance.

⁹⁴ *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*, ed. by Desamparados Cabañes Pecourt, p. 52; Canellas López, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, I, 322.

⁹⁵ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, pp. 223–24. On the suppression of rebellion in Majorca, see Lévi Provençal, *Un recueil de lettres officielles almohades*, 'Relation de la prise de Majorque par les Almohades', pp. 68–69.

The Battle of Las Navas in the History of Navarre

Modern scholars disagree about the precise location of the battle of Las Navas. Christian Navarrese sources dating to the fifteenth century place the site of the battle at Puerto de Muradal, some 13 km north of Las Navas.⁹⁶ Most interesting from our point of view, it appears that those reports stemming specifically from Navarre have preserved the most precise details with regard to the exact location of the battle and are apparently corroborated by modern historical and archaeological research.⁹⁷ This would support the hypothesis that the Navarrese had exact information regarding the battle because of their direct involvement in the deception of the Muslim forces. While preparing for battle, the Christian forces, it seems, had been manoeuvring already on 11 July, when some of the Christian knights created the impression that they had retreated towards Toledo. Historians address various factors that contributed to the outcome of the battle, making mention of both sides. These include the size of the forces and supplies, preparation of plans for the order of the battle, number of participants in the battle, and the motivation and aggressiveness of the soldiers.⁹⁸ However, without underestimating the importance of these factors, nearly all the contemporary sources, both Christian and Muslim, followed by modern historians, emphasize the element of surprise in securing a tactical advantage for the Christians, an advantage that turned out to have played an important, if not decisive part in the outcome of the campaign.⁹⁹

On 14 July, prior to the battle, al-Nāṣir was completely unaware of the fact that the Christians had already gained a tremendous advantage over the Almohads and were able to observe all the Muslim forces' movements from their observation posts. On 15–16 July, the Christians surprised the Almohads

⁹⁶ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, p. 280: 'las cadenas de Navarra, representan aquellas que el Miramamolin tenía en torno de sí cuando fue vencido en el puerto de Muradal' (the chains of Navarre represent those that the Miramamolin had around himself when he was defeated in the gate of Muradal). The archbishop of Valencia, Don Francisco de Navarra, wrote that Sancho, King of Navarre: 'que se halló en la batalla de las Navas de Tolosa que agora llaman el puerto de Muradal' (had fought in a place called 'el puerto de Muradal').

⁹⁷ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, pp. 280–89; García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 493–97; Landa El Busto, *Sancho VII el Fuerte rey de Navarra*; Fortún Pérez de Ciriza, *Sancho VII el Fuerte*, pp. 217–44.

⁹⁸ García Fitz, *Castilla y León frente al Islam*, p. 227–28; Molénat, 'L'Organisation militaire des Almohades'.

⁹⁹ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 94–100.

and captured their vanguard with their first attack. Muslim vanguard forces, as depicted by the Christian sources, withdrew in panic, dragging along the caliph himself and his commanders.¹⁰⁰ This would explain their rapid penetration into the heart of the Muslim camp. Historians find it difficult to explain the paralysis that struck the Muslim forces at that very moment. Although the latter recovered at some point and returned to battle, in a confrontation that took place on 16 July, the Muslims were severely routed.

Two highly dependable Muslim sources, al-Marrākushī and Ibn Khaldūn, seem to have analyzed the situation correctly. Al-Marrākushī attributes al-Nāṣir's defeat to the surprise tactics which caught the Muslims off-guard, and Ibn Khaldūn pinpoints the Christian king's duplicity with the collusion of Alfonso, as the cause of the Muslim rout.¹⁰¹ Both sources are consistent with Sancho's turnabout on the very eve of the battle of Las Navas, and this alignment with the Christian sources provides confirmation that the surprise caused such shock among the Muslim troops that they found themselves incapacitated during the critical moments of the campaign.¹⁰²

The chroniclers of Navarre were eager to glorify the part taken by Sancho in the battle, perhaps precisely because of his last-minute decision to join the Christian camp and the fact that he ensnared his own ally. In addition to the aforementioned regarding the limited number of soldiers and of the accuracy of the location of the battle, the Navarrese chroniclers also link the role of Sancho and his knights in the battle of Las Navas against the Almohads,

¹⁰⁰ García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, pp. 504–36; Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, pp. 246–48; Jiménez de Rada, *Toletanorum Opera*, ed. by Lorenzana y Buitron, p. 181: 'maguer que de comienzo fiziera semeianza que non querie y venir, pero pues que y veno, quando llegaron al dia de la batalla et del peligro, non quiso apartar del servicio del Dios el prez de la su valentia nin del su corazón' (he made the impression that he does not want to come, but after he had come, when they got to the day of the battle and danger, he would not distance [himself] away from the service of God and from the honour of his bravery). On Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's relation towards king Sancho VII, see Ramírez Vaquero, 'Pensar el pasado, construir el futuro'.

¹⁰¹ Al-Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-muʿjib*, trans. by Dozy, p. 236, «المعجب في تلخيص أخبار المغرب» «وخرج أمير المؤمنين من مدينة جيان فالتقى هو والأدبنس بموقع يعرف بالقرب من حصن يدعي سالم فعياً الأدبنس جيوشه ورتب أصحابه ودهم المسلمون وهم على غير أهبة فانهزموا وقتل من الموحدون خلق كثير (The caliph left the city of Jaén, and he and Alfonso met in the affair known as al-Iqab, very near to a fortress named Salem; and Alfonso summoned his army and prepared his friends and startled the Muslims caught unready; they had been defeated and a large number of the Almohads were killed); García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, p. 526.

¹⁰² On the chronicle of Abi Zar', *Rawḍ el-qirṭās*, with regards to the battle, see Roudh el-Kartas, ed. by Beaumier, pp. 339–42.

with the adoption of a new coat of arms by the royal house of Navarre after the throes of battle. According to the chronicles, at the battle of Las Navas Sancho took the chains (*cadena*s) of the Muslims' camels and tents by force of arms and emblazoned them onto his shield.¹⁰³ Historians have suggested yet another explanation, by which the origin of the chain in the Navarrese coat of arms may be attributed to the custom of African Muslim warriors, at the time of the battle of Las Navas, of chaining themselves together for battle like an impenetrable wall to ensure that they avoided being separated or quitting the battlefield. One of the chronicles narrates that at the battle of Las Navas the king of Navarre cut through those chains and opened a pathway that lead right to the tent of the Muslim king, thus bringing the Christians victory.¹⁰⁴ Although only a presumptive connection can be established between Paris's description of the battle (paragraph 12) and Archbishop Amaury's report, essentially based on the presence of the prelates as I have suggested, and though no direct connection can be established between these two sources and the Navarrese chronicle, close similarities appear with respect to what occurred near the caliph's post in the decisive hours of the battle of Las Navas.

The Return of the Delegation and the Severance of Negotiations between England and the Almohads

John's offer to the caliph of Morocco was relevant in the weeks from the beginning of June until the middle of July, when the battle took place, and there is a narrow margin of possibilities with regard to the exact dates of the delegation's arrival and departure. With the Almohads encamped in Seville and later in Jaén, and the Christian coalition making its preparations in Toledo, the confrontation between the two armies was only a matter of weeks away. The Muslim forces, under the command of the caliph al-Nāṣir, assembled at Alcazarseguir, in May 1212. The caliph remained in Seville until the beginning of June, moving to Jaén, south of the river Guadalquivir, as early as 3 June. At that very moment, in England, John was forced to change his plans to make a broad assault against Philip Augustus. Information received on the intention of the barons to rebel in Wales, and even more so the accumulation of infor-

¹⁰³ Canellas López, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, I, 333–39; *Colección diplomática del rey Don Sancho VII*, ed. by Marichalar, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Huici Miranda, *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista*, p. 280. On Navarrese Heraldry, see Menéndez Pidal, *El Escudo de España*.

mation about a conspiracy against the king, obligated John to postpone the invasion and deal with the rebels and plotters. Instead of a powerful offensive against France, during which the monarch thought to ensure his fiefs and direct the Muslim assault against France, had the Almohads crossed the Pyrenees, John dealt during the summer months with his enemies from within. During June, the Christians continued to move from Toledo southward, where they conquered a large number of Muslim strongholds and sowed panic among the Almohads.¹⁰⁵ Alfonso and his army gained Alarcos on 6 July. In Alarcos or in Salvatierra, on the same date, Pedro joined him, and according to some of the chronicles, also Sancho, two kings who met previously in Calatrava. Apparently, on 7 July 1212, four weeks after he met with al-Nāṣir in Seville, and one week before the battle, Sancho had switched camps and betrayed his ally, al-Nāṣir.

It appears that the English delegation arrived at the caliph's seat of residence while he was residing in Seville, that is, at the beginning of June, at the latest. Possibly, the delegation left with a response from the caliph to John by early July, and by the time that the news of the battle and the treachery of the king of Navarre became known, the delegation was already making its way back to England. Thus, in any event, the message carried by the diplomats would be irrelevant upon their arrival in England, no matter when that might have occurred — whether after 7 July, when Sancho had changed sides, though the delegation did not yet know, or sometime after 17 July, when the result of the battle and Sancho's role in it became widely known. One way or another, the defeat rendered a mutual alliance meaningless from all vantage points. The results of the battle of Las Navas sliced scalpel-like through Almohad as well as English and Navarrese affairs. Political circumstances prior to the battle, which had produced various political and military alignments, were changed in one stroke. The battle defined a historical period in which Islam was perceived by the Christians as massive force both in the East and the West. In this period, the spectre of a large-scale Muslim conquest poised to transform the geopolitical status quo still hovered over Christian Europe. John's initiative of sending a diplomatic delegation to the court of the Muslim caliph at the beginning of the offensive against his Christian neighbours, one that could have changed the location of the frontier, occurred as it did on the eve of the historical turning point, and it belongs to the same historical period. The geopolitical situation on the eve of the confrontation between Western Muslims and Christians confirms Paris's story, and, according to this narrative, John acted in order to defend his fiefs and to safeguard his rule over them.

¹⁰⁵ García Fitz, *Castilla y León frente al Islam*, p. 230.

ANGEVINS ON THE BORDERS OF IBERIA: WARS, COALITIONS, AND FEUDAL LAW

The Wars over the Fiefs: Changing Coalitions and Feudal Law

Two years after his ascension to the throne, in 1156, Henry II did homage to Louis VII on all his fiefs in France. Henry then became ruler of a vast area already referred to by contemporaries as an 'empire' and according to modern historians 'the Angevin Empire'. With the acquisition of Aquitaine in 1152, it included England, Brittany, Anjou, Normandy, Maine, and Poitou. Henry II ruled over this empire for twenty-one of the twenty-four years of his reign, while residing in Normandy and Anjou, wherefrom he spread the administration of Normandy and England also to Brittany, Maine, and Touraine.¹ Throughout the second half of the twelfth century, Normandy-Anjou and France aligned in the spheres of economic relations, society, and secular and ecclesiastical administration, despite the fact that politically these fiefs had been part of the English Crown. Thus, a situation developed wherein English kings controlled from their residence the fiefs of Normandy-Anjou, territories whose ties with France became ever stronger. The kings of England stayed on the mainland, and, until John's days, these fiefs were the centre of Angevin political and military activity. England, in fact, might have been the territory which constituted the 'fief overseas'. While the later Angevins might have tyrannized the population and flouted many of the older Norman customs, the contention that they treated the duchy as an appendage of the kingdom is hardly defensible.

¹ Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire*, pp. 186–87; Powicke, 'The Angevin Administration of Normandy'.

Aquitaine, along with the fiefs subject to it (the duchy of Gascony and the adjacent counties of Toulouse and Bearn), passed into English rule in 1152, as Louis VII divorced Duchess Eleanor, and Henry II rushed to marry her and thereby become ruler of the whole west of 'France' from the Channel to the Pyrenees. Already in earlier periods, Aquitaine was notorious as a province that resented encroachments from feudal overlords. However, the local barons, especially from Basque Gascony, despite fiercely guarding their autonomy, did not create an independent kingdom but acknowledged the *de jure* superiority of the kings of France. The latter were for centuries so wholly removed from the implementation of practical royal control in the area that the feudal subordination to the kings of France, including the Capetian dynasty in its turn, held no practical significance.² In the eleventh century, Norman settlers took over the duchies, and even under the Norman dukes, Aquitaine continued to maintain its independence. In the middle of the twelfth century a surge of anarchy erupted in the south-western duchies. Indeed, historians consider Eleanor's engagement to Louis VII in 1137 as a last resort taken by Duke Guillaume X, in the absence of sons that would inherit him, to keep the duchy from utter disintegration.³ Although Henry II's legal status in regard to Aquitaine and Gascony was quite clear, Louis VII tried to regain control over the fiefs and endeavoured to appeal the Angevin control in the neighbouring county of Toulouse. His efforts were unsuccessful, and in 1173 Henry II received homage from the count of Toulouse. The Angevin Empire had reached the peak of its expansion, and the subordination of Toulouse brought the kings of England even further along the borders of Spain and to the coastline of the Mediterranean. Yet, control over Aquitaine, in the opinion of both contemporary chroniclers and modern historians, constituted between 1154 and 1224 the Angevins' most difficult mission. Especially challenging was control over Gascony, whose Basque-speaking barons with their proximity to Navarre from the south of the Pyrenees made the whole fief an independent principality, and thus yet more isolationist. The barons in Aquitaine and Gascony, as well as the clergy and the cities, sought to preserve self-government, and only with great difficulty had the Angevin kings extracted from them homage oaths and feudal services in which they were committed as vassals. Henry II took upon himself in this duchy, to a much greater extent than he did in his other fiefs, the rudimentary tasks of forcing the barons to submit and to establish his practical

² Lopez, *Naissance de l'Europe*, pp. 250–60.

³ Petit-Dutailis, *The Feudal Monarchy in France and England*, p. 169.

authority as a duke. Angevin policy centred mainly upon defending the duchies against takeover attempts on the part of the Capetians, on the suppression of rebellious attempts by the local barons, and on maintaining strong castles in order to allow for safe transport on the roads. Great effort had been put into sustaining the prestige of the feudal lord through the appointed officials in positions of tax collection and by positioning a number of the king's associates who kept the peace.

Martin Aurell writes with respect to Plantagenet control of Aquitaine that 'it is tempting to apply the adjective "colonial" to describe their presence in principalities never anything other than foreign and hostile'.⁴ Richard I (1189–99) did homage to Philip Augustus, as duke of Normandy, and as he was crowned king of England the entire Angevin holdings passed into his hands. Richard ruled the various territories with a combination of fragmentation of authority and balance of power. The administration in England and in the northern continental fiefs had been stable enough that the kingdom could be run despite the long absence of the king. On the continent generally, the power of the Angevins diminished from north to south. As dukes of Normandy, the kings of England had traditional authority over the duchy. In Anjou, their authority was based on the power they had wrested from the warrior barons, and in Aquitaine, with the exception of the barony of Poitou, where they ruled directly, the kings of England did not hold much more authority than that of a powerful baron. The feudal ties that connected the Gasconian barons and the Poitvines to the duke of Aquitaine were weak.⁵ The smaller vassals, not to mention lords of the large duchy fiefs, refused to fulfill their feudal obligations, such as military service or hospitality, to the king. The duchies were described as a land of warriors, lacking clear loyalty. The clergy and the cities, although they received far-reaching privileges, and some communities were recognized as independent, refused to support the Crown. In order to safeguard their relative liberty, the barons of Aquitaine turned to an external tribunal to adjudicate nearly every issue. They regularly bypassed the duke and appealed to the highest authority, their overlord, the king of France. Thus, only war could secure for the Angevins' control of Aquitaine and Gascony. This fact required the constant presence in the duchies of the king or of a family member. Henry II appointed his son to this task. Already in 1167 Richard received Aquitaine, and in 1169, at the age of twelve, did homage for the duchy to the king of France. Indeed, the influence of

⁴ Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire*, p. 190.

⁵ Petit-Dutaillis, *The Feudal Monarchy in France and England*, pp. 169–70.

Aquitaine on England reached its peak during Richard I's rule. Richard spent much of his reign as duke of Aquitaine in the region between the Loire River and the Pyrenees, and he used force and determination to suppress the uprisings of the Aquitaine barons. The castles, which were one of the major means of control of the barons, were held by mercenaries, who for their part collected their wages from the local population. Richard I appointed separate administrators for Aquitaine and Gascony from among the local barons. I have noted earlier the English–Navarrese collaboration, in which Richard and Sancho worked together to restrain the local barons.

When Henry II's eldest son and heir died in 1183, the king suggested that Richard transfer the duchy of Aquitaine to John and accompany him to Normandy and England as his successor to the throne. Richard refused, and, suspicious that his father was trying to drive him from his fiefs, he attached himself to Philip Augustus. By dint of a series of agreements that the king of France had succeeded in extracting from Richard, and by a number of aggressive measures taken beginning in 1189 while Richard was in the East, Philip Augustus was able to regain his status in the fiefs as a feudal lord, and by sowing internal conflict was able to weaken the Angevins. Richard crushed in January 1194 John's attempt to take over Normandy with the assistance of Philip Augustus, and with the support of the pope had established alliances with Castile and Navarre, and had taken over previously lost parts of the county of Toulouse. Richard continued in his local wars against Philip and strengthened the defensive fortifications in Normandy through the construction and accelerated renovations of the already existing castles and forts. Much of the heavy expenses waged by the incessant wars over the continental lands were financed by funds taken from overseas lands, that is, from England.

Upon Richard's death, John was recognized by the barons as duke of Normandy, and in May 1199 he was crowned king of England. His first undertaking was to appropriate the Angevin territories lying between Normandy and Aquitaine, before Philip took advantage of the doubt as to the legal validity of John's succession to the English Crown instead of his nephew, Arthur of Brittany. Philip demanded, because of what he saw as an arbitrary takeover of Normandy, that John cede northern Normandy to him and transfer to Arthur the counties of Anjou, Touraine, and Maine. John's refusal to accept Philip's terms resulted in a war between the parties. In May 1200, John and Philip Augustus signed the agreement of Le Goulet. The agreement included some clauses that were in John's favour, and other clauses that worked, especially in the long-term, against him. From Philip Augustus's standpoint, the agreement with John, like the Messina agreement signed between him and Richard

in 1191, strengthened his authority as the feudal overlord. It emphasized that any matter related to the kings of England, as long as they remained his vassals on the continental fiefs, had to be dealt with in the French royal court. John acknowledged formally and publicly that he was a vassal of the king of France. In the opinion of modern historians, the crucial element in the agreement was the payment of 20,000 marks sterling John gave to Philip as 'relief' (*rechatum*) for his fiefs and as payment for Philip's recognition of John's overlordship in Brittany.⁶ From Philip's point of view, the payment represented renewed recognition of the legal supremacy of the French Crown.⁷ The Le Goulet agreement had, however, some serious long-term implications. The fiefs held by John were placed under feudal law as it was interpreted by the French Crown, and it eventually laid the foundation to Louis VIII's claim to the English Crown following his marriage to John's niece, Blanche of Castile. This marriage furthermore drew the powerful Iberian kingdom of Castile with Aragon and Toulouse on her side to France, and distanced them from England.⁸ Thus, the immediate cause for the renewal of hostilities that broke out between Philip Augustus and John after the agreement was John's annexation of the county of Angoulême, following his marriage to the heiress Isabella, daughter of Count Adomar and the cancellation of her engagement to Hugh de Lusignan. This was in violation of the vassal obligation, per feudal law, to the king of France. After a long, drawn-out war that lasted from 1202 to 1206, Philip succeeded in conquering Normandy, Anjou, Maine, Poitou, and Brittany. Whether the situation in Normandy was overwhelmingly John's responsibility, or the outcome of a protracted process in which the duchy was in any case slipping from Angevin grasp, is still debated by historians. Some argue that various structural aspects which had been present for decades became suddenly apparent, and that John was the victim of historical inevitability. Others point to the more proximate cause of baronial unrest stemming from John's farming out of large sections of Norman administration to his personal, mercenary civil servants, and his consequent detachment and alienation from his barons.⁹ In any event, the old ancestral fiefs

⁶ 'Right of relief' was 'the right the king, as supreme suzerain, possessed, in theory, to demand relief on each change in the holder of a fief held directly from him'; see Petit-Dutaillis, *The Feudal Monarchy in France and England*, p. 187.

⁷ Powicke, *The Loss of Normandy*, pp. 200–05; Bradbury, *The Capetians*, pp. 176–81.

⁸ *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, trans. by Riley, IV, 150; *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla*, ed. by Desamparados Cabañes Pecourt, p. 36; Petit-Dutaillis, 'Les Copies du traité de paix du Goulet (22 mai 1200)'.

⁹ Power, 'King John and the Norman Aristocracy'.

of the English Crown had been irretrievably lost and only the latest acquisition, Aquitaine and its most southerly province, Gascony, remained in John's hands.

Despite the loss of the northern fiefs, John retained a considerable area in south-western France, on the borders of Spain. The duchy of Normandy was small in comparison to the duchy of Aquitaine, and when taking into consideration the counties subject to Normandy which John lost in his war with Philip, Aquitaine and Gascony were still quite sizeable, although in terms of resources, it was the most valuable of the continental possessions. However, the most significant change, much more important than the size of the territories, pertains to the definition of the term 'the overseas fiefs' and, even more than this, to the character of the feudal ties between John and Philip Augustus. These changes in the legal-political status of the duchies serve as circumstantial evidence for the historian, and they strongly support the delegation story's account of John's proposal to the Almohad caliph. Since the middle of John's reign, after the loss of the fiefs in north-western France, the concept of 'the overseas fiefs' transformed and received quite a different geographical as well as political meaning.¹⁰ John's political centre of gravity lay in England, and he numbered the continental fiefs amongst his possessions, notwithstanding his efforts to reconquer Normandy.

John was the first English ruler since the Norman Conquest to live permanently on his English estates and to conduct his rule over both insular and continental lands largely from England. Thus, the overseas fiefs were, in regard to where the king was situated and the main territory in which he was active, for the first time since William the Conqueror the fiefs on the mainland. While this reality had been forced upon him, it nonetheless resulted in a significant political, administrative and conceptual transformation. During John's reign, the differences between the insular lands, England, Ireland, and Wales, and the overseas-continental lands became manifest. Additionally, the legal and feudal differences among Normandy, Aquitaine, and Gascony became deeply entrenched. Normandy, both before and after Henry II's reign, until conquered by Philip Augustus, was subject to the kings of France. Whoever held the duchy, whether its own Norman dukes, the house of Blois, or the house of Anjou in their position as holders of the English crown, did homage to the kings of France and held it as a fief. However, of the kings of England only Henry II and Richard I offered homage to the king of France for Aquitaine.

¹⁰ Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, argues that 'then the political centre of gravity had been in France; The Angevins were French princes who numbered England amongst their possessions. [...]. But from the 1220s and onwards the centre of gravity was clearly in England; the Plantagenets had become kings of England who occasionally visited Gascony' (p. 1).

John was the first to disrupt the pattern, and during his time there occurred a significant shift in the status of the duchy and thus also a significant alteration in the broader concept of the legal status of 'the English overseas fiefs'. From the perspective of the progress of administrative centralization, John's rise to power and his conduct of foreign diplomacy after 1206 brought a drastic change to the state of affairs in Aquitaine. Modern historians deem this as a change for the worse. To establish his status in the duchy, John was forced to offer major concessions to the Poitevin nobles and in doing so strengthened the power of several local families, who behaved, as described by Martin Aurell, 'as an equal partner with the king and subjected the castellans, the lesser nobility and the towns to its own domination'. The heads of these families managed their policies 'of shifting alliances between Philip Augustus and John according to the flow of political circumstances'.¹¹

Gascony was finally incorporated into Aquitaine in 1059. There, the barons were known for their rebellious tendencies and were quite disconnected from the English Crown. Hence, the situation was even more complex. Recent studies have challenged the established view regarding the nature of the later Angevins' governance of the fiefs south of Loire. The situation may be understood as complex and difficult from the point of view of the English Crown, due to the isolationist nature of the barons, or as relatively stable due to the Crown's alliance with the cities. Already Richard, but especially John, had granted privileges to the cities in Gascony and thus made them allies of the Crown against the barons and other external factors. When Alfonso VIII of Castile invaded Gascony in 1205 and, with the support of the local barons, sought to seize control of the lands that he argued belonged to him through his wife, Eleanor, daughter of Henry II, the city of Bayonne, among other cities, closed its gates and forced the Castilians to retreat southward to the Pyrenees. No doubt, this withdrawal of the king of Castile from the fiefs of the king of Bayonne, none other than John, also reached the ears of the Almohads, and, as we have seen, echoed through the Muslim chronicles, which seem to have made reference to the visit of an ambassador on that king of Bayonne's behalf to the court of the caliph. The alliance of the kings of England, particularly from the time of John, with the cities and against the aristocracy created what Martin Aurell has called 'a new deal in the local political marketplace, won the loyalty of the citizens and in return they acknowledged a sense of gratitude to the Plantagenets'.¹²

¹¹ Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire*, p. 193.

¹² Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire*, p. 195.

Recently, Nicholas Vincent has uncovered the details of the English presence in Gascony at the beginning of the thirteenth century, in large part thanks to the extensive documentation pertaining to the royal administration in the duchy during John's rule.¹³ It turns out that John greatly strengthened the grip of royal law in Gascony and the administration of this royal duchy. This was so, notwithstanding its economic ties with England, which grew stronger after the loss of the northern lands. Thus, we now know that John's grip over the duchy was strong enough to warrant an offer to the Almohad caliph such as was described in the delegation story. The payment of feudal tax was well known in England and throughout the whole of the Angevin territories as a part of the feudal rent within the framework of even the smallest rural fiefs in exchange for protection. There, as Stephan Epstein puts it, 'feudal lords extracted an agricultural surplus from the peasantry through decentralized legal compulsion backed by military threat; the surplus was perceived directly as rent in cash, kind or labour, and indirectly through taxation, levies on trade and the provision of justice'. John's choice of language in the offer to the caliph reflects an overall perception that all fiefs in the kingdom belonged to the Crown, as a state tax.¹⁴ Here we may find an expression of royal efforts toward political-fiscal centralization, and the transfer of feudal enforcement measures from the subject vassals to the highest territorial authority; in other words, the transfer of law concerned with the submission of the vassal to the baron, to the submission of the baron to the king. This transfer was reflected in John's offer, as Paris writes in the delegation story. Although rooted in the feudal tradition, it is unquestionably part of a process of transition that was initiated by John, possibly as part of administrative influences originating south of the Pyrenees. Indeed, John anticipated in this as in other areas, administrative actions that would come to fruition only much later on. He had initiated political centralization, again in Epstein's words regarding transitions in English feudal system of early thirteenth century, 'the transfer of sovereignty over feudal means of coercion from subordinate lords to superior territorial authorities — transformed feudal rights of jurisdiction that sanctioned a decentralized mode of coercion, into fiscal or property rights over commercial transactions that sanctioned a centralized, state-based mode of coercion'.¹⁵ Taxation, and especially the scope

¹³ Vincent, 'Jean sans Terre et les origines de la Gascogne anglaise', pp. 535, 542–64.

¹⁴ Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, II, 1361–62: a state tax. See *Ch. maj.*, II, 559: 'et teneret et deditum teneret ab ipso [...] sub tributo'.

¹⁵ Epstein, 'Rodney Hilton, Marxism and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism'. The prevailing concept in the Anglo-Norman Feudal system was that everything emanated

of enforcement and collection, was a significant expression of legislation and concentration of power in the hands of the Crown. With the payment of tax, official authorities reappeared, employed wage earners and mercenary troops, in lieu of a military rule accompanied by an inherited contract. Since in the feudal hierarchy the king almost always had control over more land and vassals than did the other lords, and because by the nature of their authority they had more opportunities to impose taxes, their potential earnings were enormous. Thus, as noted by Marc Bloch, 'the state' already began to acquire for itself one of the essential elements of superiority: the development of vast wealth, greater than the wealth of the individual or the wealth of any private community.¹⁶ The authority to collect taxes, as a royal law in England, rested on the legislative strength of the Angevin kings. In a vigorous action in 1170, Henry II halted the process of transferring by inheritance the position of sheriff in the various districts and ousted all the sheriffs, while reinstating only a few. In this manner, he clarified that the king was the master of all those in control under his name in all of the fiefs of the Crown and every bit of land in it, even if it was a plot leased by a lord who was a subordinate to the king. Using his officials, John succeeded to an even greater extent than his father in enforcing the authority of the Crown. This was true both from the legal and fiscal standpoints and not only over his important proxies but also over each and every vassal. In accordance with his policy of centralization, John desired to legislate the submission of the vassal to the baron, and the submission of the baron to the king. Just as it was expressed in Gascony, so it was in its simple meaning in John's offer to the Almohad caliph in the *Chronica majora*.

from the king. There from his power which has not been eroded as in the Frankish system. William the Conqueror established the practice of general oath of allegiance to the king, to which all subjects were obliged, and Henry II reinforced it and made it a principle of law. In the unofficial law book *Leges Henrici*, dating from 1114 to 1118, all vassals owed fealty to their direct lords, as well as to the king. See also Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 88. Marc Bloch points out that the county of Anjou was amongst the earliest regions in which the gifts given to the lords by their vassals turned into a permanent tribute; Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, 219–24. With regards to John's acts in this context, see Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, II, 14: 'Finally, having at his coronation sworn to maintain the liberties of his kingdom, he had broken his oath by making it tributary; Lewis had been chosen into his place with the common counsel of the realm, by the barons who, under the terms of the Great Charter, which John had sworn and broken, were fully justified in doing so.' See also Crouch, 'Baronial Paranoia in King John's Reign'.

¹⁶ Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, chap. 31.

The authority of the king, as Nicholas Vincent has argued, was quite firmly recognized in Gascony, and John was aware that the cities and some of the barons would reject switching their allegiance from the king of England to the king of France. Further, as Martin Aurell has noted, 'it is a historical paradox. The king of England never ruled more effectively the south-west — up till recently a region barely governable — than when his other principalities were clasped to the heart of France'.¹⁷ Historical research has revealed a fairly complex picture of the administrative rule of the kings of England in Gascony in the early thirteenth century. However, one of the major reasons that John was able to test and to make the most of the diplomatic and military policy options at his disposal in the international arena was that he had made changes in the status of feudal law in the struggle over the fiefs in south-western France. The Angevin empire was, according to historian Robert Fawtier, 'a collection of fiefs which luck had brought together under the rule of a single family, and which luck and the laws of inheritance might again split up'.¹⁸ The laws of inheritance, like the other feudal laws, played a central role in the struggle over the fiefs, alongside marriages and wars. From the time of Louis VII, Capetian kings found themselves facing a powerful Angevin force spreading throughout western France. Subsequently, in the former's hands, feudal law was wielded as an instrument to curb that expansion and regain control of the fiefs. The kings of England were obligated to appear in the court of the king of France whenever the latter summoned them for any infringement of feudal law. Such violations occurred frequently, due to the complexity of the rules and the conditions on the ground, and they played into the hands of the Capetians, mostly, as mentioned, during the reign of Philip Augustus, who successfully exploited the situation. Henry II, king of England, during whose reign the Angevins were at their peak of expansion, was, from the perspective of the law, no more than one of the major vassals of the king of France. In Aquitaine he had an altogether different status. There, he was the husband of Duchess Eleanor and the one who handled her ducal assets. With respect to the duchy of Normandy, and the counties of Anjou and Poitou, which Henry II distributed among his sons, the king activated the law of *pariage*, which meant that his eldest son was entitled to inherit all the fiefs and to be suzerain, even if his brothers received their own properties. However, with respect to Aquitaine, Henry took advantage of the unique feudal situation and prevented the application of the law, since it was clear that the duchy

¹⁷ Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire*, p. 196.

¹⁸ Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France*, p. 139.

belonged to his wife, Eleanor. And when Eleanor bequeathed the duchy to her son, Richard was obligated to do homage in her name to the king of France and not to Henry, king of England.

Henry II repeatedly defeated his suzerain Louis VII on the battlefield, while at the same time paying him homage. While Henry won and held onto his fiefs, he became more and more known by local barons in his fiefs in France as someone who violated the law, not just one who rebelled against his overlord — a characteristic that was shared by the barons themselves in regard to Henry. This image that clung to Henry II and his heirs as feudal law-breakers against their highest authority had a decisive influence on the conduct of the barons in the French regions of the Angevins towards their English kings. Philip Augustus, for his part, emphasized in his policy towards the kings of England the importance of the law within the framework of the struggle between the king as highest authority and his vassals. With the exception of a short period, during the days of Richard, in which he himself violated not only the feudal customs but also canon law, Philip Augustus used feudal legislation meticulously as a faithfully toward the goal of undermining Angevin power.¹⁹ The Messina agreement signed between the two kings in 1191 stated that if two sons would be born to Richard, the younger would hold from the king of France as vassal one of the major duchies, either Normandy or Aquitaine, and that all the claims of Richard as duke of Aquitaine would be brought before the court of the French king. This was a pivotal agreement in terms of the place of feudal law in the struggle for mastery over territories. That is, all the fiefs that Henry held as one entity without the intervention of the king of France broke into smaller units such that each component was considered a separate fiefdom by the king of France by the rules applicable to it. The king stressed his status as supreme lord by virtue of the fact that he was the one who had demanded the regulation of the succession laws and thus ruled that the rivalries between his feudal vassals would not be settled through private wars but through legal proceedings in his court.

From the perspective of the lawyers, the law interpreters of the court of Philip Augustus, the English king who held Normandy, Anjou, and Aquitaine was simply one of his vassals, subject to all the limitations of being a baron. Even if this interpretation was in stark contrast to what occurred in reality, and even if it was impossible to enforce it due to the power of the vassal, it did in the long run affect the course of events. As mentioned, during 1192, while Richard was in the East on a crusade, John allied with Philip with the intention of seizing the

¹⁹ Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*, pp. 259–303.

Crown and allowing the king of France to invade Normandy. Richard hurried back but fell captive to Emperor Heinrich VI; the emperor released Richard in 1194, when he saw fit to use him to curb the expansion of Philip Augustus, who had already prepared with John the invasion of England. The German emperor demanded of Richard not only a huge ransom but to also transfer the kingdom of England and to receive it back from him as an imperial vassal. Within the broader historical context and in reference to the delegation story, it then turns out that the one who actually delivered the kingdom of England in its entirety to another overlord and received it in return as a fief, although within the framework of the feudal law that was customary in the Christian orbit, was none other than John's brother and predecessor on the throne, Richard I.²⁰ The legal formulation relating to the transfer of a kingdom as a fief and the turning of a king into a vassal in the charters issued by the kings was precisely drafted, and it was meaningful within the framework of the Christian feudal world; that is, within the relationship between vassals and lords, whether secular or ecclesiastical. Certainly this was true during the reign of John, the watershed period in the administrative history of England. When the succession dispute between King John and the pope ended in the spring of 1213, both sides signed an agreement, according to which John surrendered himself and his kingdom to the pope's overlordship, and he received it as a fief from the pope's hands. This is the only extant written instance in which John surrendered himself as vassal and retained his kingdom, the kingdom of England as a whole as a fief from another person. In only this agreement did John word, rather conventionally, the phrase 'the kingdom of England' in its entirety.²¹

The death of Richard brought to the fore the question of the legal inheritor of the Crown of England according to feudal law. Was it to be John, Richard's brother and Henry II's youngest son, or Arthur of Brittany, John's nephew, the eldest son of Geoffrey? The custom of Normandy was to give preference to the king's brother, and the custom of Anjou was to give preference to the nephew. The English precedents did not help to resolve the issue. However, in England the barons preferred John over Arthur. Aquitaine was not required to decide the question because the queen mother, Eleanor, was the duchess, and in both instances the candidate would be family. Yet Eleanor did prefer John and

²⁰ Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 299.

²¹ Innocent III, *Opera omnia*, lib. xvi, cols 876–78: 'offerimus et libere concedimus [...] totum regnum Angliae et totum regnum Hiberniae cum omni iure et pertinentiis suis [...]. Et ad modo illa a deo et Ecclesia Romana tanquam feodatus recipientes et tenentes' (italics mine).

assisted him in capturing the throne. It is very possible that this choice of the English barons of John as king was a reaction on their part to the policy conducted previously by the Angevin kings who, their view, were overly engaged in the affairs of their fiefs in France. John never had extensive fiefs on the mainland, and though he was from an early age lord of Ireland, he was called by the sobriquet 'Lackland'. Presumably, the English barons hoped that he would not stubbornly cling, as his predecessors did, to the fiefs across the Channel, at the price of their involvement in a constant, never-ending, and expensive war with the king of France. In fact, the distancing of the English barons from the issue of the fiefs on the continent was one of the most effective weapons in the hands of the kings of France, who knew how to make good use of it. Philip, for his part, did not hesitate. He took advantage of the controversy about John's inheritance of the Crown and harnessed his interests for the benefit of Arthur, the barons of Brittany, Anjou, Maine, and Touraine. Philip intervened as feudal overlord and as Arthur's guardian, and worked determinedly to disconnect Normandy from Aquitaine as well as to sow discord and internal rivalry throughout the fiefs of the English Crown.

However, the most significant change in the status of some of the English fiefs on the mainland occurred in the sphere of feudal law during John's reign. Immediately upon Richard's death, the duchess Eleanor acted to protect Aquitaine from Philip Augustus. At his coronation, on 27 May 1199, John was not the duke of Aquitaine, and the possibility of French intervention required the duchess to swiftly establish her authority over the land. She hurried to Poitou to receive homage from her subjects, and then, in mid-July, she offered homage to Philip Augustus, her overlord. Philip had even agreed on the occasion to recognize the right of Eleanor and Alfonso VIII of Castile, to reach an agreement about Gascony, without having to bring the agreement for his approval, and took over the right to intervene only if the parties could not themselves reach an understanding.²² Immediately thereafter, Eleanor and John announced charters in which the Queen Mother ceded Aquitaine and Poitou to John. He responded by placing his mother in the position of *domina*, such that she would control the fiefs for the remainder of her life. One consequence of this process found its expression in the aforementioned pact of Le Goulet, in which John did homage to the king of France on all his lands in France, with the exception of Aquitaine. This was an unprecedented action in the framework of the feudal relations between the Angevins and the Capetians, and perhaps *sui*

²² Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France*, p. 148; Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, pp. 282–89.

generis in Europe in general. In this manner, John and Eleanor handled, in what historians have called a 'diplomatic masterstroke', the demands of Arthur of Brittany and of his patron Philip Augustus, king of France.²³ Eleanor did homage *in propria persona*, that is, accepted from the king of France the legal right to intervene in the internal affairs of Poitou of Aquitaine. This action redefined, and placed on a different basis altogether, the relationship between the duchy and the English Crown. Even after the death of Eleanor, after the marriage of John to Isabella of Angoulême, and after the disappearance of Arthur, the legal basis did not blur the solidity of Aquitaine's exemption from legal commitment to the Capetian crown. From early in John's reign, then, Angevin control of this duchy and the subordinate fiefs was insured in a legal manner wholly different from which the Angevins had previously controlled the duchy, and certainly different than the feudal manner in which they controlled Normandy and the northern counties. It also prevented the local barons from appealing to the king of France against the king of England, a move which often, as mentioned, was taken in order to weaken the power of the direct rulers.

More than his predecessors, John succeeded in sustaining an administrative net, and he appointed officials in those places in which he could collect taxes. As mentioned, the barons in Aquitaine and Gascony sought doggedly to maintain their independence, and by not joining with Philip Augustus of France, further supported, albeit indirectly and remotely, John's rule.²⁴ However, as much as feudal law played a central role in the framework of the struggles for mastery over the fiefs, a constant threat of forced occupation hovered over John's fiefs in western France. Phillip found the opportunity to exercise his right of suzerain by attacking John and taking by force — on feudal legal grounds — the Angevin fiefs, when he discovered the marriage of John to Isabella of Angoulême. The county of Angoulême was located on the road between Poitou and Gascony, and the county was hostile to the Angevins during Richard's reign. Due to its location, which controlled the road linking the northern and southern parts of western France, this was a highly strategic county. Through this marriage, John succeeded in solidifying his control over the area and strengthening the route linking the north and south. Phillip made sure to adhere as closely as possible in this incident to feudal laws. Ralph of Coggeshall, a contemporary English chronicler who refers to John's marriage affair, describes the legal process taken by Philip Augustus. He writes that the king of France convened his

²³ Martindale, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine: The Last Years', pp. 154, 156–60.

²⁴ Petit-Dutaillis, *The Feudal Monarchy in France and England*, pp. 171–77.

court and announced that John had lost his right to all the fiefs that he and his ancestors had held as vassals from the kings of France, because over time he had failed to provide the services required from him as a vassal, and particularly because he failed to stand up as needed to his overlord in the affair of the marriage to the countess of Angoulême. Philip's breaking of the feudal obligation with John essentially gave the French king a legal framework in which to be aggressive towards his vassal. In July 1202, Philip received from Arthur homage for Brittany, Anjou, Maine, and Touraine, but Philip's main interest was in Normandy. One month later, Arthur was captured and imprisoned by John and in April 1203 was put to death, although John's involvement in the affair was publicly confirmed only in 1210. By June 1204, Philip had conquered Normandy, and by 1206 the barons of Anjou and Touraine had abandoned John and switched their allegiance to Philip. Historians have already proposed that John was not solely responsible for the change in the nature of his feudal relationship with the king of France. The 1202 ruling issued by King Philip Augustus against John following his marriage and subsequent aggression severed the feudal ties that had conjoined for more than a century the house of Anjou to the Crown of France. Had the king of France desired to settle the dispute about the duchy of Aquitaine and adjudicate it as a feudal question, he would have had to re-acknowledge John as his vassal and persuade him to acknowledge his formal reign over the fiefs that he had conquered.²⁵

During the first years of his reign, John's presence in Aquitaine forestalled the forcible occupation of the duchy. As late as 1206 John left to wage war against Philip from within the lands of Aquitaine. John pushed Philip out of the territories into which he had entered by force and thus stabilized the duchy under his direct rule. The core of John's rule in his lands on the continent passed to Poitou, and from there John fought to reconquer Normandy and Anjou.²⁶ After 1206, John spent most of his time in England, becoming a distant and less powerful authority relative to his overseas territories. In 1207 John received an envoy of the sultan of Egypt 'on an undisclosed mission' and entered into a treaty with King Alfonso of León.²⁷ Philip, however, took the

²⁵ Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France*, p. 148.

²⁶ Historians sometimes adhere to the dynasty from the days of John, as the 'Poitevins'; see Clanchy, *England and its Rulers, 1066–1272*, p. 136.

²⁷ Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England*, pp. 15–16, refers to this undisclosed mission, which, in light of his negotiations with the Almohads, demands further investigation. As for the treaty with León, see Rymer, *Foedera*, I, 96.

opposite approach and adopted a threatening manner towards the local barons. Hence, the strengthening grip of the English over Aquitaine during those years is associated, rather paradoxically, with John's absence in the duchy. Naturally there were the interests of the Aquitaine and Gasconian barons, who preferred a distant English king to a strong and involved French king who dictated political leanings. However, their traditional manoeuvring ability to set one lord against another was circumscribed in a remarkable and innovative way by John's legal measures. The status of the king of England in relation to the overseas fiefs constitutes the broad historical context that confirms a number of sections of the delegation story in Paris's chronicle. From the perspective of feudal law, John was the lord of the duchies of Aquitaine and Gascony, and was thus able to offer the Almohad caliph their strategic use as part of a political agreement. John proposed to allow the caliph to pass through a portion of his kingdom, so that had the caliph succeeded to reach Navarre, and had he actually intended to cross the Pyrenees, he may pass his troops through Gascony as a beachhead for the outflanking of Castile, and as a territory through which to advance northward. From the perspective of his administration in Gascony, John would raise due tax revenues as head of centralized 'state bureaucracy' and transfer them, perhaps with the administrative skills and assistance of some of his close officials to the caliph. All these actions were suggested, of course, in return for the Almohad ruler's commitment to protect the territorial integrity of the English lands in the face of an expected attack from his enemy, Philip Augustus, king of France, and his allies.

FROM THE 'KING JOHN QUESTION' TO GOVERNANCE: POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY IN AN ERA OF TRANSFORMATION

*King John and the Historians: On the Difficulties
Inherent in their Exposition of his Reign*

A great deal of effort, and a great many words, have been expended in very old debates about whether King John was a good king or a bad king, and the extent to which historians have over- or underestimated personal factors when accounting for the tumultuous course of his reign.¹ I will survey as briefly as possible these scholarly debates and consequently attempt to note the shift which, in my view, Paris's delegation story enables us to make from the narrow discussion of the 'King John question' to wider fields of research. In 1961, Warren C. Hollister authored what was then, and to a considerable extent continues to be, the state-of-the-art historiographical survey of John and his reign. Here, the author lays out in full view the core concerns arising from the study of the works of modern historians on John. Hollister maintains that 'King John Lackland was surely one of the most enigmatic figures ever to rule England. The dramatic ambivalence of his personality, the passions he stirred among his own contemporaries, the very magnitude of his failures have rendered him an object of endless fascination to historians and biographers.'² Historians have dealt with John by first summing up his activities as that peculiar amalgam and then advancing their views by setting forth the no-less-awkward duality of his

¹ For a general survey on King John and his reign, see Gillingham, 'John (1167–1216)'.

² Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 1. Hollister refers especially to a biography on King John published that year. See also Warren, *King John*.

personality. In this way, some scholars have actually removed John from the discourse of history and by doing so have left behind significant unresolved paradoxes. The important question of the place of the individual in history is thus unanswered. Hollister hones in on this alleged duality when he writes that 'many scholars believe that his ingenuity was never more evident than at those moments that are commonly associated with his most dramatic failures'.³

Contemporary historians still write passionately on John, who 'is generally regarded as one of the worst English kings', and discuss events related to his reign as such that 'need to be traced to the specific personality of King John'.⁴ Indeed, it is still quite common to find historical works on John that first assess his reign as a strange hybrid of success and failure and only later provide analysis concluding with the no-less-puzzling duality of his personality. Accounts of John's reign are strongly coloured by the particular way in which John's personality is assessed. In the twenty-first century, too, John's personality captures centre-stage in attempts to interpret the anomalies arising from his period of rule.⁵

King John's alleged admixture was set forth in four major spheres of his activity; thus, in territorial issues, he was accorded responsibility for losing an empire while at the same time defending and tightening his control over his fiefs. Victorian historians such as Thomas Macaulay and Bishop William Stubbs see in the disengagement from Normandy the victorious birth of English 'nationalism'.⁶ Stubbs writes that with the loss of Normandy, 'England began to be ruled more distinctly on rational principles, for English purposes

³ Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 7; *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, ed. by Meyer, III, 180–82.

⁴ Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', pp. 248, 252. Two recent references to King John still carry the headline 'Good' or 'Bad' King John: see Seel, 'Good King John', and McGlynn, 'Damned by his Peers'.

⁵ Church, *King John: New Interpretations*, pp. xxv–xxvi, concludes his introduction by suggesting that 'The John who emerges from the pages of this volume is not a sympathetic character'. See also, Church, *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*, pp. xix–xx.

⁶ A recent research on the fate of the duchy of Normandy has been written within the conceptual framework of the frontier. Daniel Power points out that 'King Philip's triumph was only possible because ducal control over the frontier regions of southern and eastern Normandy had already crumbled over the previous decade'; see Power, *The Norman Frontier*, pp. 1–2. For a detailed discussion of the terms 'Angevin' or 'Plantagenet Empire', see Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire*, pp. 1–6. On English medieval 'Nationalism', see Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*, pp. xviii–xxii; Moore, 'The Loss of Normandy and the Invention of Terre Normannorum, 1204'.

and by Englishmen [...] and the nation became more [...] distinctly conscious of its unity, and, so to speak, of its personal identity'.⁷ While historians attributed the loss of Normandy to John, he was nevertheless credited with having been the first king since William the Conqueror to have spent most of his years in England, as well as the first to impose English authority over the British Isles by, amongst other means, the unprecedented subjugation of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. It has also been pointed out that he met unparalleled success in defending his remaining dominions on the continent, in Aquitaine and Gascony — notwithstanding the fact that, as John Gillingham notes, 'John became an English king of England only by defeat and against his will'.⁷

Was John a competent administrator and a tyrant at the same time? Historians have claimed that he exerted a long-term influence on England with his contribution to the improvement and streamlining of the central government that came to be regarded as a model for emulation by other institutions of government in the kingdom.⁸ However, these same historians note that the very dedication displayed by John in developing the bureaucracy and the legal system aroused antagonism among the barons. Thus, despite his achievements, John's intensive pursuit of these fields, together with his constant presence in England after the loss of Normandy and Anjou, have been viewed as resulting in an over-extended administration, despotism, and over-personalization, all of which in turn led to disaster.⁹

Was Magna Carta an accomplishment or failure, from John's point of view? The signing of Magna Carta in 1215 is regarded by some historians as a reflection of the king's capitulation to his rebellious barons in the wake of their reaction to unrestrained tyranny. At the same time, the charter is considered by those very historians to be one of the greatest constitutional achievements of John's reign.

This twin perspective may already be found among Victorian historians. For instance, John R. Green writes that 'John perished in a struggle of despair

⁷ Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, pp. 11–13; Danziger and Gillingham, *1215: The Year of Magna Carta*, p. 164. See also Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, pp. 80–82. On John's control over Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in 1211, see *Memoriale fratris Walteri de Coventria*, ed. by Stubbs, II, 203. See also Turner, 'King John's Military Reputation Reconsidered'.

⁸ Vincent, 'Why 1199? Bureaucracy and Enrolment under John and his Contemporaries'; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, pp. 199–201.

⁹ Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', pp. 5–6; Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, p. 274: 'Resentment against John's style of government [...] created wide circles of antagonism'. See also Verger, 'Les Serviteurs de l'État'.

against English freedom', and also that while John had indeed surrendered to the aristocracy, he was 'the ablest [...] of the Angevins'. In designating Magna Carta as the symbol of English freedom, Green indicates that when John signed the document his legal advisors had drafted, he laid the constitutional foundation for republican rule in England, and perhaps to a large extent even for 'modern democracy'.¹⁰

Lewis Warren claims that 'John handled the situation with sensitivity to its delicate balance and a resourceful ingenuity which, whatever one thinks of him as a man, can only enhance his reputation as a ruler of consummate ability'.¹¹ James C. Holt shows how the publication of Magna Carta marked the final stage of a process initiated by John's predecessors, though only ripening into maturity in this king's time. On the one hand, John busied himself awarding countless liberties to individuals and communities, thus sowing the seeds for the idea of a general charter of liberties for the whole community of England; on the other hand, the monarchy 'reserved the right to break, ignore, withhold or suspend these very rules at its own convenience, and could bend and twist them to suit its own immediate interest'.¹² David Carpenter counterbalances John's signing of Magna Carta with the loss of Normandy and the civil war and praises the king, who 'seizing the initiative went ahead at once and issued the Charter [...] not one dictated to John after military defeat'.¹³ A recently published collection of essays edited by Janet S. Loengard is dedicated to a renewed discussion of Magna Carta and the historical setting in which it was written. The volume includes extreme appraisals of John's personal inadequacies, which purportedly led to the barons' revolt and the issuing of Magna Carta, as well as highly positive evaluations of the monarch's outstanding administrative skills which contributed to the drafting of the charter.¹⁴

Did John challenge the Church and the papacy or submit to its demands? Historians' accounts of John's relations with the pope during the period of the

¹⁰ Green, *A Short History of the English People*, p. 238. On Magna Carta as a mythologized document, see Vincent, 'Introduction'.

¹¹ Warren, *King John*, p. 232; Holt, 'Rights and Liberties in Magna Carta'.

¹² Holt, *Magna Carta*, p. 29; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 265–66; Holt, 'Rights and Liberties in Magna Carta'.

¹³ Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 289–90. On Carpenter's argument that John issued the Charter over the heads of the general body of the baronial rebels, challenging them to accept it, see his *The Reign of Henry III*, chap. 1. Also Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. ix–xiv, 289.

¹⁴ Loengard, *Magna Carta and the England of King John*, pp. 1–9.

interdict and the accord by which he ended the Canterbury succession dispute are also characterized by a strong dual-edged sense. Hollister writes that 'his surrender to Innocent III, for example, was accompanied by manoeuvres which transformed the pope from a remorseless enemy into a valuable ally'. He even quotes Warren, who thought that 'far from being an act of humiliation, John's submission was a clever bit of diplomacy'.¹⁵ We hear a similar strain in the words of Stephen D. Church:

But it was in his relationship with the universal church that John showed the best and the worst of his character traits [...] the Canterbury dispute which led to an interdict [...] was caused by John's failure to see that Innocent III was quite capable of choosing his own candidate for the See. But in his reconciliation with the papacy, John showed himself to be a masterful tactician.¹⁶

Irrespective of era, source material, research methodology, and political or ideological developments, historians from John's day down to ours have seen an element of the magical or psychopathological in John's character. Even prior to his ascension, John was viewed with ambivalence by contemporary chronicles, such as Gerald of Wales, Ralph of Coggeshall, Ralph de Diceto, and Adam of Eynsham. John's 'fractured personality' emerges from the writings of the Anonymous of Béthune and from the Marshal History.¹⁷ It appears, however, that this persona was mostly fashioned by two chroniclers of the first half of the thirteenth century, Roger Wendover and Matthew Paris.¹⁸ Wendover, and Paris after him, solidified the traditional view, attributing to John a monstrous character. Those monastic chroniclers firmly established the notion that John's 'failure' stemmed directly from ghastly moral defects, and that indeed he received his just deserts for his wickedness: 'Foul as it is, Hell itself is defiled by the foulness of John.'¹⁹

¹⁵ Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 7.

¹⁶ Church, *King John: New Interpretations*, p. xxvi.

¹⁷ Holt, *King John*, p. 19. See also, *Memoriale Fratris Walteri de Coventria*, ed. by Stubbs, II, 232. On the chroniclers contemporary to John's early reign, see Gillingham, 'Historians without Hindsight'. See also Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 70–87, 92–93; *History of William Marshal*, ed. by Holden, I, 21; Gillingham, 'The Anonymous of Béthune, King John and Magna Carta'.

¹⁸ Galbraith, 'Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History', p. 124; Seel, 'Good King John', p. 27.

¹⁹ *Cb. maj.*, II, 669: 'Anglia sicut adhuc sordet foetore Johannis, Sordida foedatur foedante Johanne gehenna.'

After the centuries during which Tudor humanists and Stuart historians took quite a different view, Victorian historiography of John revisited the hostility of the St Albans chronicler monks.²⁰ Contemporary historians, who published critical editions of the medieval chronicles in the framework of an extensive philological project, judged John almost exclusively on the basis of the chronicles that they edited. Scholars such as William Stubbs, John R. Green, and Kate Norgate portrayed John as 'Satan's first-born son', the embodiment of evil and the worst-ever king of England. At the same time, however, they recognized a remarkable concentration of abilities in that demonic personage.²¹ John Richard Green's *A Short History of the English People* was published in 1875 to instant popularity. His view of John as 'no weak and indolent voluptuary but the most ruthless of the Angevins' was adopted by Kate Norgate, whose biography of John was published in 1902. She, too, resorted to superlatives to describe the king.²²

Halfway through the twentieth century, historians were still relying on the chronicles to deal with the purported 'enigma' of John's personality. However, at this point they replaced the description 'demonic' with terms adopted from the developing discipline of psychology. John, once a monstrous devil, became a suffering human being.²³

Taking into account all possible perspectives from which John could be examined, this time relying on the royal chancery records, an accumulation of new data and the help of new historiographical methodologies, historians working in the latter half of the twentieth century onward also identified personality as the source of the striking incongruity between the king's wins and

²⁰ On Tudor and Stuart Historiography on John, see Bendall, 'Speed, John (1551–1629)'. See also Turner, *King John*, pp. 168, 261; Loengard, *Magna Carta and the England of King John*, p. 3 n. 7; Galbraith, 'Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History', pp. 128–29; Appleby, *John King of England*, pp. viii–x; Levin, 'A Good Prince'; Levin, *Propaganda in the English Reformation*. See also Prynne, *The History of King John*.

²¹ *Memoriale Fratris Walteri de Coventria*, ed. by Stubbs, I, pp. xi–xii, 114–32. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, II, 17. See also Campbell, 'Stubbs, William (1825–1901)'; Galbraith, 'Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History', p. 128; Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*, pp. 1–7, on the influence of Stubbs' *Constitutional History* in particular, pp. 129–31.

²² Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 19, opens and concludes his article with Green's ambivalent view of John. See also Norgate, *John Lackland*, pp. 1, 286.

²³ Petit-Dutaillis, *The Feudal Monarchy in France and England*, p. 215. See also Petit-Dutaillis and Guinard, *L'Essor des états d'Occident*, pp. 137–38. For Previté-Orton, see *Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*, II, 708, and also Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 14.

losses.²⁴ These historians, who endeavoured to portray a more balanced picture of John, maintained that he was an extremely capable ruler endowed with sharp intelligence.²⁵ At the same time, however, they attributed his ineffective military leadership, as well as his injudicious hostility toward friend and foe and his arrogant and cruel treatment of captives, to character deficiencies.²⁶ John Gillingham makes a clear-cut connection between John's personality and his performance as king noting that 'the most important component of Angevin government was the king himself. His personal character still counted for more than any other single factor [...] and John was an awful king'.²⁷

Ralph Turner, who penned in the mid-1990s a biography of John, also traces to the king's personality what he described as the astonishing dichotomous nature of John's actions.²⁸ David Carpenter's conclusions appear at the very beginning of his exposition: 'It was the start of one of the most disastrous and momentous reigns in history'.²⁹ In his introduction to a collection of essays

²⁴ For a more balanced study of John, one which considers the royal chancery records but brings the chronicles back into the picture, see Carpenter's foreword to the 1997 Yale edition of Warren's *King John*, p. ix.

²⁵ Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 7. On John's education, see Church, *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*, pp. 4–6, 14–15; Lewis, 'The Birth and Childhood of King John'.

²⁶ Galbraith, 'Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History', p. 129. John Gillingham adopts Galbraith's conclusions with respect to the treatment of John and the historians. In his 1999 article entitled 'Historians without Hindsight', he argues that the early chronicles, unlike those of the St Albans School, are closer in their appraisal of John to the picture that arises from archival documentation. Referring to the chronicles of Ralf of Coggeshall, Ralph de Diceto, and that of Roger of Howden, Gillingham depicts John as he was seen by contemporary chroniclers, in a manner that is very similar to that in which he is seen by modern historians, as a bad king; see Gillingham, 'Historians without Hindsight'. See also Graham E. Seel's note on Gillingham's assertion with respect to incomes of France and England at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and the fact that 'chronicles normally critical of John lend support to the suggestion that England was financially derelict upon John's succession'; Seel, 'Good King John', p. 26.

²⁷ Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, pp. 47, 64. On earlier historians, see Holt, *King John*, p. 26; Warren, *King John*, p. 259; Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, pp. 324–26; Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, pp. 389–90; Turner, *King John*, pp. 258–64; Turner, *King John: England's Evil King?*; Turner, 'England in 1215', pp. 2, 10–26.

²⁸ Turner, *King John*, pp. 258–65. See also Turner, 'King John in his Context'. See Lewis Warren's essay, in which he re-examines Sidney Painter's conclusions with respect to King John: 'Painter's King John: 40 Years On'.

²⁹ Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 263–76; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 71–74, 92–94.

on John published in 1999, Stephen Church notes the tendency in studies dealing with the extreme disparity between John's achievements and his failures — some written by a new generation of late twentieth-century historians — to target as the culprit John's disposition.³⁰

In 2009, the proceedings of a conference dedicated to Magna Carta reflected this centuries-long attempt to make sense of the 'dichotomy enigma'. Nearly one-third of the volume portrays the king and his reign as a queer fusion of gain and forfeit, with the scholars themselves (Ralph V. Turner, John Gillingham, and David Crouch) described by the editor as being in a state of 'conflicted analysis'.³¹ Two more recent studies of King John consider, in their final analysis, that his personality was the outstanding cause of his failure.³²

My reading of the delegation story stands opposed to a spate of enigma: simultaneous victory and failure, a duality of character. Paris's story helps to work out the puzzles. John does not appear as a failure — certainly not an abject failure, or someone behaving in a Satanic manner or labouring under the weight of outstanding character deficiencies. John's political conduct reflects an awareness of all his options within the context of the immensely complex, interwoven, and rapidly changing political circumstances of the time. The proposed arrangement with the Muslim caliph was offered in the framework of certain geopolitical realities regarding his overseas fiefs, in the summer of 1212, on the eve of the military encounter. Certainly, the delegation story does not pretend to describe a glorious victory, and it is not my intention to portray John as a genius. From John's, as well as al-Nāṣir's, perspective, the negotiation between them presumably mediated by a common ally, Sancho VII of Navarre, was not less, but also nothing more, than a realpolitik attempt to improve their respective positions. John emerges as pragmatic, intelligent, perhaps brilliant, but not as a genius. He did react in a typically adroit manner by gleaned information from the relations between Sancho and the Almohads, and applying it for his own purposes in a quite different arena. John was, at this point, under papal ban for four years and on the brink of war with Philip Augustus. Al-Nāṣir, for his part, was poised for a confrontation with Alfonso VIII, and

³⁰ Church, *King John: New Interpretations*, p. xxvi; Bradbury, 'Philip Augustus and King John'.

³¹ Loengard, *Magna Carta and the England of King John*, p. 3.

³² Morris, *King John*, pp. 289–98. Stephen Church writes that 'he was a man placed, by accident of birth, the vagaries of life and his own ambition, into a position of power for which he proved himself to be ill suited'; see Church, *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*, p. xx.

in the summer of 1212 John and al-Nāṣir had common enemies. Each soberly explored the range of available options. Even if the mission had been successful, and an accord between England and Morocco had gone into effect, the agreement would have been only one like many others, holding force until another arrangement supplanted it. A clear example of this can be seen in the alliance, one might even say close friendship, between the Almohads and Sancho, which vanished in the instant that the king of Navarre decided to decamp. Even this 'betrayal' did not leave a terribly deep impression on Christian-Muslim relations, and many other political pacts were signed between these Western political entities when interests dictated such a strategy.

As long as the geopolitical conditions held regarding the Almohad's viability of vanquishing the Christian kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula in July 1212, there was still strong significance to an arrangement of the kind suggested by John to the Almohads. However, from the moment the Muslims were routed in Las Navas de Tolosa, the political reality both on the Iberian frontier and in England was irrevocably transformed. Historical circumstances, rather than John, were responsible for the 'failed' expedition. John, learning of the results of the battle at Las Navas and Sancho's about-face, might well have been both relieved and disappointed. The forecast of a Muslim invasion north of the Pyrenees had changed, but so had the opportunity to enlist a strong ally in the defence of the overseas fiefs at the very moment that he was on the verge of committing his forces against Philip Augustus.

But John had another plan. After a sharp downturn in the geopolitical situation following the results of Las Navas, John made a calculated political and governmental move that he had probably kept on reserve for just such a time. The easiest way for John to limit his liabilities at that point was to make peace with the pope. In reconciling with Rome, John defused the French-papal front by means other than those which had been considered but a short time earlier. In November 1212, three months after the battle of Las Navas, John sent a delegation to Rome. In a letter dated May 1213, John made both England and Ireland fiefs to be held henceforth by the papacy.³³ The consensus among historians is that John had done extraordinarily well. At the very moment that he found the risk of continuing hostilities with the pope too high to bear — or, alternatively, that the potential for benefit for termination of hostilities was at its peak — he sent a delegation to Rome. As we know, it was John who decided when to end the conflict with the pope. The former enjoyed sufficient strength

³³ Innocent III, *Registrorum*, ed. by Migne, lib. xvi.

and status at home to accomplish this, despite the apparent crisis following the uncovering of the plot against him in mid-August 1212.³⁴

John was neither a mastermind nor a devil. With respect to his foreign policy, he emerges from the delegation story as a competent king who correctly read the contemporary political map. However, in extending his reach beyond the familiar feudal world of alliances, John introduced a significant innovation. He took part in negotiating and consolidating alliances with an Islamic political entity, hence drawing England and its continental territories nearer to the cross-cultural type of relations more customary in Iberia and in the Mediterranean.

The situation is similar regarding John's behaviour in the expanded delegation story, namely, the additions noted by Paris concerning John and the role he played in the Amohads' incursion of Spain (paragraph 12). In each of the four areas that have been flagged as indicative of enigmatic dualities, one finds evidence of nimble adaptation to the facts on the ground. When the documentation is permitted voice, John's activities in each of the four spheres too lose their 'sotto voce'. We now see that his conduct was fully entwined with contemporary historical structures and forces. Hence, the questions of to what extent John's personality affected the historical course of events and whether it is possible to distinguish between his individual personality and his role as a ruler finally may be differently addressed.³⁵

A Possible Explanation for John's Game-Changing Conduct: John and Ireland

As a nineteen-year-old, John was given his first true test of responsibility on the changing frontier region, in Ireland. While his brothers Henry, Geoffrey, and Richard proved their skills in battles in familiar surroundings, exercising traditional military and administrative means in the old familiar feudal fiefs, John's

³⁴ Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, pp. 342.

³⁵ Bradbury, 'Philip Augustus and King John'. A more balanced historiographic attitude, which combines the two aspects, is suggested by Martin Aurell in *The Plantagenet Empire*: 'the incompetence of King John was the root cause of what happened in 1204. But that does not account for everything' (p. 265) and 'the retreat from this vagabond life by King John, shut up within his palaces and hunting lodges on the Thames so as to avoid the crowds of commoners that he disliked as much as his father enjoyed them, says a lot about his loss of his continental possessions' (p. 268).

initial contact with warfare, administration, and rulership occurred, however briefly, in Ireland. The experience may well have been formative.

From the late eleventh century, Ireland and Wales had both been the western-most frontier regions of medieval Europe and had constituted the periphery of Norman feudal imperialism. John's marriage to Isabella of Gloucester in 1189, as well as his hold of territories in Lancaster, brought him relatively close to frontier politics in Wales, where he spent much time and probably knew better than any English king before him. Ireland, however, was for him an area of crucial significance.³⁶ John was crowned 'lord of Ireland' (*Dominus Hiberniae*), the title that was given to the designated king, and in 1185 he made his first voyage there. John's relationship with Ireland has also been an axis of historical debate from the thirteenth century to the present day. Did John succeed or fail in his management of this land? Here, once again, historical assessment has been constructed in terms of dichotomous enigma, a mixture of triumph and failure whose explanation lies, at best, within historical contexts and social structures and, at worst, within John's deficient personality. Seán Duffy, who has recently broached the topic of John and Ireland in modern historiography, maintains that John's governance of Ireland was far from a success. He holds that the king replicated in his rule of the island the mistakes he had made elsewhere. Duffy essentially argues against Lewis Warren's thesis, according to which already from 1185 John and his advisers were preparing a coherent and well-thought-out plan to advance English colonial expansion in Ireland and to continue expanding until they controlled the entire island. In fact, Duffy's thesis stands against the wider contention according to which John had succeeded in bringing Ireland under the ordinary pattern of royal government. The same plan included the construction of castles and forts by the Crown and barons, which was intended to provide security for the settlers and the establishment of administrative and economic centres, which would in turn form a bridge-head for further expansion. Throughout his reign, John kept up good relations with the Anglo-Norman settler-barons, and through them the English governmental system was implemented. But Warren argues that the change in policy towards the local Irish population occurred much later, only after 1212, when John needed the support of the barons. He maintains that only at that time did John promise them, in return for their loyalty, a free hand with the local

³⁶ Church, *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant*, pp. 19–32; Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 335; Rowlands, 'King John and Wales'; Davies, 'Frontier Arrangements in Fragmented Societies'.

Irish chieftains. This meant, in practice, the dispossession of land and legal discrimination. Duffy seeks to prove, against Warren, that the Crown's stance vis-à-vis Ireland had already changed by the time of Henry II. In this view, reconciliation with the locals and their subsequent equality under English law had already occurred by 1185 and had been part of a consistent policy from John's early days in Ireland.³⁷ Duffy also takes up the subject of the 'frontier'. He writes that 'John inherited in Ireland, if he did not himself create an unruly frontier society'.³⁸ However, John's relations with Ireland should be evaluated with proper historiographic methodology. That John perceived Ireland as an area to conquer, one in which to expand during English dispossession and colonization, and in which its indigenous people and rulers had no share, is a notion that is modified by the background of frontier. Robert Bartlett, who has examined the Irish frontier society, points for instance to differences between the aristocratic settlers in two waves of immigration in the twelfth century, including during John's time. He discusses the crucial differences between the Anglo-Norman colonization, on the one hand, that followed the invitation of the Irish kings, as frequently occurred on the Scottish border, and the colonization of migrants who received territory from the Crown, on the other.³⁹

Elsewhere, Bartlett points out the extensive privileges which John granted in the late twelfth century to colonizing settlements in Irish frontier towns, such as Dublin. Bartlett details the unique aspects of those charters, particularly in terms of the legal status of residents and their economic rights. Ireland in the days of John appears as a prized frontier; the king tried to attract settlers with legal and economic incentives that made conditions far superior to those found at home.⁴⁰ The model from which these two border cities on the Irish frontier took their privileges was none other than London. We have already seen the singular nature of the Commune of London and its decisive impact on John's administration of the entire kingdom. The Commune itself was essentially a frontier region, exceptional in the feudal landscape. John thus also approached the Commune of Dublin in a manner in which no English king before him had

³⁷ Warren, 'King John and Ireland'; Duffy, 'John and Ireland'. See also Davies, *The First English Empire*; Martin, 'John, Lord of Ireland, 1185–1216'; Duffy, 'King John's Expedition to Ireland, 1210'; Church, 'The 1210 Campaign in Ireland'.

³⁸ Duffy, 'John and Ireland', p. 239. See also Veach, 'King John and Royal Control in Ireland'; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 241–44.

³⁹ Bartlett, 'Colonial Aristocracies of the High Middle Ages'.

⁴⁰ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, pp. 170–71. On privileges to Dublin, see Rymer, *Foedera*, I, 82.

dealt with a city, because he found himself in an entirely new situation. John's conduct in Ireland is not, therefore, a question of the success or failure of his visits there in 1185 or later in 1210. Gerald of Wales's stories that depict John as a failure in every respect do not accord with what seems to be, in light of current historical research, an organized plan for the settlement and colonization of the island. Whether or not John relied on the Anglo-Norman aristocracy to implement this plan, and sought thereby to dispossess the local population, as well as whether he adopted a specific policy at any given time, we may never know; the issues are as multi-determined as the reality of the frontier region itself. However, we do know, beyond a doubt, that John conducted himself in Ireland as would any ruler working under the extraordinary conditions of frontier regions. Frank Barlow too reminds us that 'John had a special interest in the frontier areas'.⁴¹ He acted indeed in these regions and times with utmost innovation, notable flexibility, and creative deviation from the norm.

*From the 'King John Question' to Questions of Governance:
Diplomacy and Cross-Cultural Relations*

Early on in our exploration of John and his rule, I introduced the notion of dividing his reign into four major spheres of activity. Among those, I included John's actions in the territorial holdings of the kingdom of England and the overseas fiefs, his measures in establishing the bureaucratic and governance structures, in the Crown's steps in relation to the barons, and in the Crown's steps in relation to the Church and the pope. I shall now demonstrate the foundations for my premise that the delegation story may be viewed not only as a model for John's enterprises throughout his reign but as applicable to broader questions of governance, diplomacy, and cross-cultural relations in an era of transformation. Indeed, in each of the spheres of John's rule, the phenomenon as it is manifested in the story with its background of the Iberian frontier has been accepted as such by modern historians, who have made free use of the conceptual framework of the frontier, with its reliance on transition terminology.

The enduring debates on King John as well as on Paris's delegation story did not prevent scholarly engagement with that king and his rule, in the wider field of cross-cultural studies. Recent historians in particular have opened up new channels of discussion, some with explicit reference to John and his endeavours. Allen Fromherz discusses the cultural interactions between the

⁴¹ Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England* (1972 edn), p. 408.

Maghreb, Andalusia, and the twelfth-century Mediterranean, noting the significant impact the Almohads had on Christian European history as a whole.⁴² Nicholas Vincent signals a possible connection between Magna Carta and Spanish legislation, arguing that 'the history of England after 1212 can be seen to march in direct step with the history of western Europe and in particular with the history of the principalities immediately north and south of the Pyrenees'.⁴³ Adam J. Kosto extends the circle of diplomatic interactions and alliances between Christians and Muslims, naming King John amongst 'outsiders who could easily get in on this act'.⁴⁴ Michael Lower examines the apparent relatively tolerant policy of popes towards the participation of Christian mercenaries in Almohad armed forces.⁴⁵ Daniel G. König re-examines the Arabic-Islamic views of the Latin West, the wider context of Islamic knowledge of and interaction with the Europeans.⁴⁶

The above represents only a handful of the growing number of scholars who have shown how various networks typically studied in a Mediterranean context actually extended much further north.⁴⁷ What has been disentangled in Paris's delegation story is in fact but another strand in the intricate web of political, diplomatic, and cultural networks that existed in the medieval West.

* * *

In the sphere of royal administration, 1199 was a landmark year. It ended an era and started a new one, from the perspective of creating an advanced bureaucracy subject to the king's authority. This was certainly true in England, and perhaps in Europe overall. John took the throne precisely midway between traditional feudal administration and the advent of a system of wage-earning officials. The latter heralded the very early stages of 'modern' bureaucracy, one that was answerable to the sovereign. Commenting on John's administration, Frank Barlow summarizes the position of several historians when he writes that

⁴² Fromherz, 'North Africa and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', pp. 44, 49, 56.

⁴³ Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', p. 248.

⁴⁴ Kosto, 'Reconquest, Renaissance, and the Histories of Iberia', p. 99.

⁴⁵ Lower, 'The Papacy and Christian Mercenaries'.

⁴⁶ König, *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West*, pp. 277–79.

⁴⁷ On the opposite concept of Iberia's uniqueness, see 'The Spain-North Africa' (SNAP) online at <<http://snap.ucsc.edu/Home.html>> [accessed 17 May 2016], and Yuen-Gen, 'Unity and Diversity across the Strait of Gibraltar', p. 8.

'1199 is a real turning point in English history'.⁴⁸ Barlow continues: 'But more characteristic of this transitional period between the feudal benefice and the pure salary were the money fiefs which he [John] gave so prodigally.' Barlow adds that when John was seeking revenues and considered all available means of collection, 'his measures were of the greatest importance in creating precedent'. Barlow also refers to subsidies: 'The subsidies of tenths and fifteenths of the sixteenth century trace back to John's seventh and the new custom system of Edward I had its forerunner in John's temporary and novel expedient'.⁴⁹ The Crown, which followed the fixed-income practice of the feudal constitutional framework, lagged notably behind in collecting its portion of revenues, even those that were legally deserved. Geoffrey Barrow notes that John did everything in his power to reduce this delay at the expense of the barons, with measures which partially disappeared under his successors and were only to return in later centuries.⁵⁰ David Carpenter argues that 'probably the years after 1207 saw the greatest level of financial exploitation since the Conquest' and adds that 'not surprisingly the tax pointed the way forward for the whole future of English royal finance'.⁵¹

Other historians have contended that the wealth of archival material originating from John's time, without precedent in any of the other medieval European realms, raised from the outset a particular interest in this king and his reign. A newfound determination to leave written testimony about everything had emerged. Recorded evidence did not become available for the first time during John's reign as a result of happenstance, and although historians argue that Richard I ruled England as effectively as John, the change was not illusory. Contrasting sharply with the feudal concept of administration, which had stressed live testimony without documentation, this thrust pushed John's officials into action.⁵² In military and naval administration John has been appraised by historians as an originator in an era of transition: he has been seen as no less than the founder of the British navy.⁵³ The loss of the north-western

⁴⁸ Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 6.

⁴⁹ Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 330.

⁵⁰ Barrow, *Feudal Britain*, pp. 195–96.

⁵¹ Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 271–72; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 88–94.

⁵² Clanchy, *England and its Rulers, 1066–1272*, pp. 135–39; McLynn, *Lionheart and Lackland*, pp. 122–29. See John Gillingham's view on the effectiveness of Richard's rule over England: Gillingham, *Richard I*, pp. 113–22.

⁵³ Stenton, *English Society in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 45; Warren, *King John*, p. 125. See

continental lands, Normandy and Brittany, and especially a change in alliances with the counts of Flanders, created new strategic problems, and for the first time since 1066 the mastery of the sea became a military necessity of the first order. John significantly increased the number of ships beyond the traditional fleet at his disposal and established a new system of command. It is yet to be explored how far were these changes influenced by North African Almohad precedents.⁵⁴ Ralph V. Turner notes that the king expanded the royal legal system to include even the smallest of landowners. This achievement appeared temporarily in the days of John and disappeared during the rule of his successor, Henry III, who allowed the barons to regain legal control over their fiefs. Turner adds that John's vision for the legal system was quite innovative: the 'law of the land' was to be conducted by royal officials, and not by members of a specific class.⁵⁵ John Maddicott points at John's political inventiveness during the episode of the 'Oath of Marlborough' in 1209.⁵⁶ While some historians have judged John's measures as opportunistic, most have viewed him as proactive.⁵⁷ This king acted in the dim interstices of established structures. He was inclined to experiment, which itself ran counter to the traditional and conservative feudal system. John's precedential moves anticipated, as modern historians have rightly discerned, much later periods. His important administrative steps encompass an expansion of the phenomenon revealed in my rereading of the delegation story as an expression of wider transitions in governance. Royal officials, payroll employees, were no longer feudal servants but experienced bureaucrats and brokers. Among other duties, they negotiated with the Muslims, sharing with them an advanced culture of political diplomacy. John initiated this transition when he sent a diplomatic delegation to the Almohad caliph's court extending diplomatic networks between Christians and Muslims far to the north of the Pyrenees.

also Carpenter's foreword to the 1997 Yale Edition of Warren's *King John*, p. xvi n. 27.

⁵⁴ On the Almohads as a medieval naval superpower, and on possible influence on English naval enterprises, see Burési and El Aallaui, *Governing the Empire*, pp. 170–217; Rouighi, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate*, pp. 76–96; Chaliand, *The Art of War in World History*, pp. 416–20; Rose, *England's Medieval Navy*.

⁵⁵ Turner, 'John and Justice': 'undone by the regime of Henry III'.

⁵⁶ Maddicott, 'The Oath of Marlborough, 1209'.

⁵⁷ Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 331: 'John's financial policy was experimental and opportunist. He needed money; he tried every method. He was not a fiscal reformer. And when one method ceased to be profitable or aroused too much opposition, he tried another.' See also Church, 'King John's Testament and the Last Days of his Reign'.

In the sphere of maintaining the territories, the year 1206, in which John lost his hold of Normandy, as well as on the counties of Anjou, Maine, Touraine, and Brittany, is also a demarcation year. It divides sharply between what came before and what happened after vis-à-vis the determined defence of the Kingdom on the Isles and the fiefs directly subject to the Crown overseas, namely, Aquitaine and Gascony. The loss of Normandy and the counties or, more precisely, the temporary concession of them imposed upon John, is thus the historical event that lies between the feudal concept of territoriality and what may be considered the emergence of a new concept of the Crown's territory.⁵⁸ It is a commonplace that John was the first king since 1066 to live and act for a considerable period of his reign on English soil, and who ruled over both insular and continental lands from England. This has been viewed as a novelty in and of itself, which occurred on the heels of the loss of Normandy and marked a new era. John's presence in the kingdom stirred a fundamental re-evaluation of the relations between the Crown and Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. John, who in his youth was sent to these frontier regions of Britain to impose the authority of the Crown, was now more interested, perhaps, in making them subservient, and brought English rule in these regions to a peak. Historians have even argued that this heralded the rule of Edward I and have agreed that his military successes as part of the said activity to protect the fiefs throughout the English frontier in Wales and Scotland were without precedent. Warren Hollister quotes Austin L. Poole, who states that 'certainly no medieval English king before or since has dealt more successfully with the Welsh, the Scots, or the Irish'. This statement, it should be noted, has currently no small number of detractors.⁵⁹ George O. Sayles points out that John ruled England in a period when, from 1191 to 1214, the first international war broke out in the West. Though the roots of this war are to be found in typically feudal conflicts, Sayles observes, it had occurred at a time when feudalism was fading and 'nationalism' had begun to emerge. The difficulty in tracking the complicated conflicts pertaining to the war between 'England' and 'France' lies in the fact that myriad old and new issues became entangled.⁶⁰ Sayles also notes that

⁵⁸ On the frontier of Normandy and its role in the fall of Angevin power, see Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 388–412.

⁵⁹ Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', p. 8 n. 39; Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta*, p. 426. Duffy has a different interpretation of John's policy in Ireland; see his 'John and Ireland'.

⁶⁰ Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, p. 391.

the two coalitions against France which were organized during this period, one in 1193 and another in 1214, caused Philip Augustus to come within a hairs' breath of losing his kingdom. In the multifaceted struggles associated with John's efforts to recapture Normandy, John instituted a new policy that deviated from that administered by his brother Richard. This policy, alongside other deviations from previously accepted norms in English European policy, enabled him to hold his nephew, Otto of Brunswick, as an ally in a coalition against France in 1214. Thus, John was able to support the coalition without having to bear the burden of its expense and the risk of openly supporting Otto until he was well established on the imperial throne of Germany.⁶¹

John's loss of Normandy has long preoccupied historians. As we have seen, one theory is that it was related to the incessant strife occurring during a transitional period between the feudal and the 'national' wars. Seventeenth-century historian John Speed claimed with reference to John that his achievements in Wales and Ireland were infinitely more important for the peace and security of England than were the titles acquired for England in its fiefs in France.⁶² Nineteenth-century historians, who tended to admire British 'splendid isolation', viewed in a positive light the steps taken by John, notwithstanding their general negative assessment of that king's achievements.⁶³ I referred earlier to Martin Aurell's consideration of the historical paradox with respect to the overseas fiefs; as we recall, his view is that the 'king of England never ruled more effectively the southwest, than when his other principalities were clasped to the heart of France'. A close look at the 'ceding' of Normandy allows us to observe the measures taken by the king toward a determined defence of his kingdom, which refers to the frontiers of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as to the overseas fiefs, namely, Aquitaine and Gascony. John was broad thinking in his management of these frontier areas, and in the interim between the feudal and 'national' systems appears to have been quite creative as well. John's steps in defence of his fiefs, viewed within the appropriate historical context, yields an extension of the phenomenon revealed in my critical rereading. Paris's delegation story, dealing as it does with the duchies on the borders of Spain and with the contemporary imperial Islamic entity of the Almohads, opens a window into how John acted in regions that were highly coloured by frontier character-

⁶¹ Fryde, 'King John and the Empire'; Raynolds, 'The Historiography of the Medieval State'; Jordan, 'The French Victory at Bouvines'.

⁶² Gillingham, 'Historians without Hindsight', p. 4.

⁶³ Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire*, pp. 263–64.

istics, interactions with Muslims included. He was motivated by the desire not only to avoid standing, from a legal vantage point, against Philip Augustus in relation to his lands south of the Loire as he had in Normandy but also to establish his authority as ruler of the kingdom of England, sovereign over territories directly subject to the Crown's jurisdiction. For this purpose, John breached the established feudal framework. He and his mother, Eleanor, the duchess of Aquitaine, took an unprecedented step in this direction, possible only in a transition period, taking advantage of the political situation by altering the legal status of the duchies of Aquitaine and Gascony in relation to the English Crown. John firmly established his hold on the duchies as land belonging to the Crown and after 1206 was, in fact, no longer in any fief, a vassal of Philip Augustus. He was the king of England, ruling over the English territories and serving no overlord as vassal. In order to ensure the continuation of this situation with respect to Aquitaine and Gascony, which despite the legal 'arrangement' was sure to remain under French military threat, John did everything in his power to protect them. Evaluating the circumstances of the summer of 1212, including the rapidly advancing threat of a Muslim invasion across the Pyrenees, John sent a delegation to the caliph of Morocco. The manner in which John sent the delegation to the Muslim court, and the way in which he proposed to deal with the caliph, may reflect the influence of Islamic political culture on the Europeans not only on the frontier region but much further to the north. Robert I. Burns refers to this influence unequivocally, as he sees in this Muslim-Christian frontier encounter one of the early stages of the formation of European 'nation-states'.⁶⁴ Rapid changes, the flow and transfer of ownership, and the continuous struggle for mastery characterized the historical context in which John ruled, and he responded with acuity to these contextual demands, even creating, toward the defence of his properties, a diplomatic network with the Almohad Islamic empire.

The process of drafting and ratifying Magna Carta, the basic paradigm for constitutional monarchy, was part of King John's endeavours with regards the barons. Magna Carta has been consistently considered from the vantage points of legal innovation and conservation. Already in the period of its granting, this question was far from theoretical, but it was modern historians who understood that the legal practices reflected in the charter 'were legal innovations

⁶⁴ Burns, 'The Significance of the Frontier in the Middle Ages', p. 313: 'War with Islam triggered the rise of nation states.'

that hung between two eras', as put by Holt;⁶⁵ that they were 'a problem of government in new conditions', as put by Sayles; and that 'its arrival does mark a "before" and "after" in English history', as put by Carpenter.⁶⁶ The year 1215 marks, then, a turning point in that during that time, the king and his barons signed a wholly new type of accord. Magna Carta appears in the process of the transition between the feudal political system and that of the constitutional monarchy. 'In its actions, although without any kind of ideological support', in David Carpenter's words, 'John was creating a new type of kingship'.⁶⁷

In a manner similar to how the privileges of the Commune of London were obtained by jury union, in which the citizens themselves offered to fight for their rights, the barons, too, offered themselves as a jury union to fight for their rights. The barons modelled their oath on the oath of the Commune (*conjunctio*). Just as in 1199 the citizens of London demanded that John confirm their freedoms, the barons required in 1215 that John confirm theirs. The barons stipulated in the 'security clause' of the Great Charter that a council of twenty-five of their representatives be established. This council was indeed set up, and in the months that followed the issuance of Magna Carta, it acted as a 'monitoring committee' to ensure the implementation of the charter. Through this, as they explicitly stated in Magna Carta, the barons wanted to establish a 'communa totius terrae'.⁶⁸ John's masterstroke of seizing the initiative and issuing the charter as a negotiated document, rather than as one dictated after military defeat, entailed not only clarifying for the first time the barons' status as 'free men' but also secured in writing the reality that already held in the previous years of John's reign, in which the barons recognized the king's sovereignty over all the territories subordinate to him. Magna Carta clearly reflected not only the king's limitations in light of the baron's 'council' but also a new type of recognition of the king's position in the eyes of the barons. With respect to

⁶⁵ Holt, *The Northerners*, pp. 109–28; Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 350; Hudson, 'Magna Carta, the *ius commune*, and English Common Law'.

⁶⁶ Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, p. 397; J. E. A. Joliffe argues that all three Angevin rulers, Henry II, Richard I, and John, established a new attitude, difficult to define, a kind of 'unrealized absolutism'; see his argument in Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', pp. 9–10 n. 47; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 449.

⁶⁷ Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 272; Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, p. 296.

⁶⁸ On John's appeal against Longchamp in October 1191 to the *communitas Angliae*, see Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, p. 313. See also Cheney, 'The Twenty-Five Barons of Magna Carta'; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 117–18.

them and to their lands, the king 'was not to be reduced to a mere feudal overlord [...] John retained complete control of central government'.⁶⁹

Current researchers identify John's taxation policy as the immediate cause of the barons' revolt of 1214 that led to the signing of the Great Charter. Since the loss of Normandy, John had been preoccupied with raising funds in order to reconquer the duchy, as Carpenter notes: 'This tranquil period came to an end with the loss of Normandy in 1204, a watershed on the road to Magna Carta [...]. His aim was to amass the treasure to win Normandy back.'⁷⁰ The levy of scutage was a tax imposed on the knights like other revenues the king managed to extract so efficiently. But while Henry II and Richard I imposed this tax a combined total of eleven times over a forty-five-year period, John imposed it eleven times within sixteen years.⁷¹ The originality lay in the radical manner in which John urged his clerks to capitalize upon the same sources of income, and especially the 1212 inquest that may have triggered the barons' rebellion in that year. Nevertheless, the extreme response of the barons in 1215 must be seen against the background of the long-standing factors that led to the uprising.⁷² It should be noted that work on French and English financial records undertaken from the late 1990s and currently by scholars such as Paul Latimer, Nick Barratt, and James Masschaele suggests that John was not facing insuperable odds in France, and that in England the period of steep price increases was over as early as c. 1204.⁷³

King John's administrative, fiscal, and constitutional policies that influenced the drafting and ratifying of Magna Carta also contain a more expanded expression of the phenomenon that emerges from a critical reading of our story. John's proposition to the Almohads is mostly about income tax, as he offers his

⁶⁹ Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, p. 290. Carpenter argues however, that John failed to provide what was in effect a new monarchy, with an ideological rationale; see Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 265–73.

⁷⁰ Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, pp. 271, 290; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 70.

⁷¹ Barrow, *Feudal Britain*, p. 197.

⁷² Frecknall-Hughes and Oates, 'King John's Tax Innovations'; Vincent, 'English Liberties, Magna Carta (1215) and the Spanish Connection', p. 252.

⁷³ See Carpenter's foreword to the 1997 Yale edition of Warren's *King John*, p. xiii; On recent research and current thinking on the economy in John's reign, see articles by Bolton, Latimer, and Barratt in Church, *King John: New Interpretations*, pp. 27–99; and Masschaele, 'The English Economy in the Age of Magna Carta'. On economic changes during John's reign, see also Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 98–101. See also Harvey, 'The English Inflation of 1180–1220'.

fiefs as tributary to the caliph. We learn details pertaining to the bureaucracy John had acquired for that purpose, as Paris describes how John urged Robert of London to capitalize upon income both in St Albans and in his capacity as an expert before the caliph. Paris also makes us privy to the evolving new concept of the king as entitled to collect 'state' revenues as sovereign over all subordinated lords, as he apparently considers himself with respect to the barons, of Gascony in this case, and as he presented himself through his emissaries, to the Almohad caliph.⁷⁴ Nicholas Vincent's recent work on both John's promotion of the English hold in Gascony and the 'Spanish connection' of English liberties and Magna Carta establishes the close relations and the influences England had absorbed, through its Christian Iberian neighbours, and as apparent from the delegation story, also through direct connections with the Muslims. The story documented the course of events involving all these developments which preceded the circumstances that brought forth the issuance of Magna Carta. Nonetheless, the fundamentals of John's four main ventures were already there.

The conflict between John and Innocent is described by historians as unusual in the extreme. George Sayles emphasizes its extraordinary nature: 'The most prolonged and severe schism between Church and State in the whole of the Middle Ages was created when king and pope came into collision over the appointment to the See of Canterbury.'⁷⁵ The interdict years, from 1208 to 1214, and the accord that was signed between the parties at its conclusion, constitutes a period of transformation that closed the door on one era and opened the door on the next. It was a transition period, featuring the germination of an 'independent' English Church and perhaps even the seeds of what would eventually evolve into 'modern' Church and state relations.⁷⁶ John's insistence upon his right to influence the important appointment of the archbishop of Canterbury was grounded in tradition and precedent, and this time initiated by a newly phrased canon law. When the interdict came into force, John swung into action, taking full advantage of every opportunity the new situation afforded him. Even his deliberate drawing out of the conflict by exploiting the ambiguity in Church-State relations without his rule being brought to collapse reflects remarkable conduct on his part. Moreover, John was quick to identify and implement those factors that 'national monarchies' would later utilize in their relations with the Holy See. That the occupant of the See in Rome was

⁷⁴ Loengard, *Magna Carta and the England of King John*, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, p. 394.

⁷⁶ Harper-Bill, 'John and the Church of Rome'.

Innocent III, whose pontificate is widely regarded as the apogee of both the spiritual and temporal power of the Roman See, neither contributed to nor detracted from John's strategy.⁷⁷ There was no shame associated with subordination to the spiritual leader of Christianity. Many European rulers similarly paid homage to the pope. John managed to turn the pontif into a friend and protector against opponents at home and abroad: Innocent allied with a king he had recently excommunicated, who in turn was allied with his enemy, the German Otto, while ranged against them were his allies Philip Augustus and Frederick of Hohenstaufen.

John's struggle with Innocent, and the manner in which he brought it to a close, clues us in to an expansion of the phenomenon that emerges from my rereading of the delegation story. Between August 1211, when the papal legates presented to John the terms for the lifting of the interdict, and November 1212, when John sent a delegation to Rome to accept these conditions, negotiations between the parties had ceased. In May 1211, the caliph al-Nāṣir had arrived in Spain, and by the summer of 1212 he had already encamped on the frontier, facing Castile and its Christian coalition. This historical data provides the link between John's approach of the pope and the delegation story. As long as the possibility existed of negotiating a strategic alliance between England and the Almohads, through which John would have been assured protection of his continental fiefs, the king held the pope in abeyance. Hence, there appears to be a component of cross-cultural influence on papal relations by Christian political entities. What has been considered by historians up until now as an Iberian problem limited to the ambit of the popes, appears more as a wider European problem and forces historians to reconsider the definitions of 'frontier' when engaged with papal attitudes towards the Muslims. Paris's report of John's foreign relations with the Almohads is in line with this king's deliberations and exceptional conduct. When the outcome of the battle at Las Navas became widely known, the proposed arrangement with the Almohads no longer made sense. John, in the abruptly changing circumstances, decided to end the conflict with Innocent with as advantageous conditions as he could negotiate. The story in its full historical context leads us to surmise that if the arrangement with the Almohads had gone into effect, John might have continued to independently run the Church of England for some time longer.

⁷⁷ Sayers, *Innocent III, Leader of Europe*.

EPILOGUE

I have attempted to show in this work that religious differences notwithstanding, negotiations between England and the Almohads resulting in the construction of a political alliance did take place through diplomatic interactions.

What may have appeared as a tight connection between politics and religion in the course of the events in the Middle Ages has led to its intertwining and sometimes misleading effects on modern historiography. The Almohad Empire that controlled the western Mediterranean markets, trade, and taxation, through one of the greatest fleets ever created in the Muslim world, refused Saladin's plea for support against the European Crusaders. Its caliphs also allowed recruitment of Christian mercenaries in large numbers and also the establishment of a bishopric in Marrākesh in 1246 for the large number of Christians residing in the city. Paris's delegation story reveals the ostensibly parallel flexibility of the political situation on the then-transforming Christian side, the English in this case. Instead of 'a reputation for unconventional behaviour with regard to Muslims', for which a modern historian found indications in the royal Angevin family conduct,¹ John's in particular, a more opaque state of affairs is revealed in the field of political and diplomatic exchange between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the West.

Paris's story introduces new historical perspectives on extensive contact between the Almohads and the Christian West. It sheds light on the professionalization of diplomatic practice and the emergence of European and perhaps also Islamic bureaucratic rulership. Yet it has other, highly significant implications. Crucially, it constitutes an opportunity to engage with the wider theme of the Mediterranean as a category of historical analysis in the Middle Ages.

¹ Barbour, *The Relations of King Sancho VII with the Almohads*, p. 20.

As the event unfolds before us, we are afforded a glimpse at a delicately shaded snapshot of relations between Muslims and Christians beyond the Mediterranean, straddling diplomacy, statecraft, and religion. Hence, this book may contribute to the field of Mediterranean studies by showing how diplomatic and political networks, now studied almost exclusively in a Mediterranean context, actually extended much further north, all the way to the British Isles. Ultimately, this examination, which follows recent scholarly reappraisals, may call into question the prevailing historiographic paradigm holding the Muslim world to have been ignorant with regard to Western Europe as well as indifferent towards the region's domestic politics and cultural characteristics.²

John played a prominent role in the political exchange shared by Western Europe and the Almohads. His negotiations with the Almohads in the form of a diplomatic delegation: its participants, its objectives, the mandate it held, and the proposition it proffered all speak to the historical circumstances in which he ruled. Matthew Paris's report of the delegation sent by John unfolds political, administrative, diplomatic, and cultural transformations occurring during this king's reign, which may explain his conduct in the various spheres of governance.

² König, 'Arabic-Islamic Historiographers on the Emergence of Latin-Christian Europe'.

APPENDIX

*Henry Richards Luard's Latin Text of the Delegation Story:
Ch. Maj., II: AD 1067 to AD 1216 (1874)*

pp. 559–64

Qualiter rex desperans miserit ad¹ admiralium Murmelim

Misit² igitur nuncios secretissimos cum festinatione summa, videlicet Thomam de Herdintona et Radulfum³ filium Nicholai milites et Robertum de Londonis clericum, ad admiralium Murmelium, regem magnum Affricae, Marrochia, et Hispaniae, quem vulgus Miramumelinum vocat; significans eidem, quod se et regnum suum libenter redderet eidem, et dederet et deditum teneret ab ipso, si placeret ei, sub tribute. Necnon et legem Christianam, quam vanam censuit, relinquens, legi Machometi fideliter adhaereret. Quod cum dicti nuncio secretius relaturi, ad curiam dicti principis pervenissent, invenerunt ad primam portam aliquot milites armatos, introitum arctius custodientes, gladiis evaginati. Ad secundum vero ostium scilicet palatii, plures invenerunt milites ad unguem armatos et prioribus elegantius, ensibus strictis ingressum diligenter custodientes, et, ut censi potuit, aliis fortiores ac nobiliores. In ostio vero thalami inferioris, multo secundum apparentiam robustiores et ferociores, et plures prioribus. Cum autem pacifice introducti, ex licentia ipsius admiralii quem regem magnum vocant, ipsi nuncio et vice domini sui, regis scilicet Angliae, reverenter salutassent, exposuerunt causam adventus sui plenius, cartam regiam ei por-

¹ B. repeats *ad*.

² This narrative will be found also in *Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. by Riley, I, 236–42.

³ *Radulfum filium Nicolai*] Written over an erasure by a modern hand. The words are not in the *Gesta Abbatum*, but they are in C.

rigentes; quam quidem interpres, qui praesens vocatus aderat, evidenter patefecit. Quo intellect, rex librum quem inspexerat clausit; sedit enim ad pulpitum suum studens, vir aetate et statura mediocris, et gestu matures et verbis facundus et circumspectus. Et cum paulisper quasi secum deliberans respondisset, modeste dixit: “Modo ispexi librum in Graeco scriptum cujusdam Graeci sapientis et Christiani, nomine Pauli, cujus actus et verba mihi optime complacent, et accepto; unum tamen de ipso mihi displicet, quod in lege sub qua natus erat non stetit, sed ad aliam tanquam transfuga et inconstans avolavit. Et id dico de domino vestro Anglorum rege, qui relicta piissima et mundissima lege Christianorum sub qua nascebatur, cereus et instabilis gliscit transmeare”. Et addidit, “Novit qui nihil ignorant Deus omnipotens omnium Creator, si exlex essem, illam prae omnibus eligerem, et acceptans amplexarer”. Postea vero sciscitabatur, cujus conditionis esset rex Angliae et regnum ejus; respondit Thomas, utpote nunciorum facundissimus; “Egregie et ingenue atavis regibus magnis procreates, terra ejus opulenta et suis contenta bonis, culturis, pascuis, pratis, et silvis abundant. Ex ea etiam omne genus metallorum studio conflatilli eliquatur. Gens nostra speciosa et ingeniosa tribus pollet idiomatibus erudite, scilicet Latino, Gallico et Anglico, et omni arte liberali et mechanica plenius erudite. Veruntamen vinearum aut olivarum copiam es se terra nostra non producit vel abietum, sed ea ex vicinis regionibus commercio sibi acquirit abundanter; aer salubris et temperatus; inter occidentem sita et septentiolem, ab occidente calorem, a septentiole sumens frigiditatem, temperiem sortitur gratissimam. Undique mari vallatur, unde insularum regina meruit appellari. Regnum etiam ab inuncto et coronato gubernatum, ab antike liberum esse dinoscitur et ingenuum, ad nullius praeterquam Dei spectans dominationem. Ecclesia etiam et nostrae cultus religionis plus quam in aliqua mundi parte ibidem prosperatur, et Papalibus ac regiis legibus pacifice gubernatur”. Tracto igitur ab alto praecordiali suspirio, respondit rex; “Nunquam legi vel audivi, quod aliquis rex, tam prosperum regnum possidens subjectum et obediens, suum sic vellet sponte pessundare principatum, ut de libero faceret tributarium, de suo alienum, de felici miserum; et se alterius tanquam sine vulnere victum dedere voluntati. Quinimmo de multis legi et audivi, quod multi sanguinis effusione et profluvio sibi libertatem, quod laudabile fuit, comparent; modo autem audio, quod dominus vester miser, deses, et imbellis, qui nullo nullior est, de libero servus fieri desiderat, qui vere miser est, immo miserrimus nullique miserabilis”. Postea vero, sed cum contempu, inquisivit cujus aetatis esset, staturae, ac strenuitatis. Cui responsum est, “quod aetate fuit quinquagenarius, et omnino canus, corpore fortis, nec procerus, sed potius compactus, et formae ad robora convenientis”. Quod cum audisset rex, respondit; “Virtus ejus juvenilis ac virilis

tepuit jam et refrigescit. Infra decennium, dato quod tam [diu]⁴ victurus sit, virtus ejus deficiet, antequam arduum quid consummasset, si nunc inciperet in defectum declinare,⁵ nec aliquid valeret. Quinquagenarius enim decedit occulte, sexagenarius manifeste. Pacem de caetero sibi adquirat et quiescat". Colligens igitur Omnia inquisita et response nunciorum, post parvum silentium, facta subsannatione in signum magnae indignationis, sprexit ille admiralius regem Johannem dicens, "Nullius est rex ille, sed regulus jamjam desipiens et senescens, nec curo de eo; indignus est mihi confoederari". Et conspiciens Thomam et Radulfum torvo vultu, ait, "Non redeatis iterum ad meam praesentiam, nec videant oculi vestry amplius faciem meam. Fama, sed potius infamia domini vestry jam apostatae desipientis, foetorem exhalat in conspectus meo teterri-mum". Recedentibus igitur cum rubore nunciis, intuebatur rex ille sive admiralius Robertum clericum, qui tertius erat nunciorum, qui parvus erat et niger, unum brachium longius habens reliquo, et digitos inordinatos, scilicet duos sibi cohaerentes, et faciem Judaicam. Perpendens igitur rex, quod tam despici-bilis persona ad tam arduum negotium declarandum non destinaretur, nisi saperet ut callidus et intelligeret; videns ejus coronam et tonsuram, et inde discernens quod esset clericus, jussit eum ad se evocari; quia aliis loquentibus adhuc tacuerat, stans remotus. Ipso igitur retento et spretis aliis, rex cum eo multa loquebatur secretius, quae postea ipse Robertus amicis suis patefecit. Inquisivit autem dictus rex ab eodem, si ex Angliae J[ohannes] aliquibus polle-ret moribus, et si liberos strenuous procreasset, et si potens esset in vi genera-tive. Addiditque, quod si Robertus super his interrogates mentiretur, nunquam, praecipue cleric, alicui crederet Christiano. Tunc Robertus sub attestatione legis Christianae se promisit ad Omnia interrogate veraciter responsurum. Dixit igitur assertive, quod "potius tyrannus fuit quam rex, potius subversor quam gubernator, oppressor suorum et fautor alienorum, leo suis subjectis, agnus alienigenis et rebellibus; qui per desidiam suam Normanniae ducatum et alias multas terras amiserat; et insuper Angliae regnum amittere vel destruere sitiebat; pecuniae extortor insatiabilis, possessionum suorum naturalium inva-sor et destructor; paucos vel potius nullos strenuous generavit, sed patrissantes. Sponsam habet sibi exosam et ipsum odientem, incestam, maleficam, et adulte-ram, et super hoc saepius convictam; under ex sponsus ejus comprehensos laqueo jussit super stratum ejus⁶ suffocari. Ipse rex nihilominus multos proce-

⁴ *diu* is also omitted in the *Gesta Abbatum*, I, 238.

⁵ *declinare*] *declinaret*, manuscript.

⁶ *laqueo* is erroneously repeated in the manuscript.

rum suorum et etiam consanguineous zelotipavit violenter, et filias corrumpit nobiles ac sorores. In cultu autem Christiano, prout audistis, fluctuans et diffusus". Haec cum audisset rex admiralius, non tamen sicut prius ipsum sprexit, sed detestabatur et in sua lege maledixit et ait, "Quare permittunt miseri Anglici talem super se regnare et dominari? Vere effeminate sunt et serviles" Respondit Robertus, "Patientissimi hominum sunt Anglici, donec supra modum offendantur et damnificentur. Nunc autem sicut leo vel elephas, cum laesum se senserit vel cruentum, irascuntur, et excutere colla de sub jugo opprimentis, etsi sero, proponunt et conantur". Et cum haec Omnia ipse rex admiralius audierat, Anglorum nimiam redarguit patientiam; quam formidolositatem recta interpretatione fuisse interpretes asseruit, qui ad Omnia praesens extiterat. Multos autem praeter hos tractatus et confabulationes habuit idem rex cum eodem R[oberto], quas postea amici splenius in Anglia declaravit. Collatis igitur ipsi R[oberto] muneribus preciosis in auro et argento, gemmis variis et olosericis, ipsum in pace dimisit. Recedentes autem nuncios alios nec salutavit, nec aliquibus respexit donativis, nec ipsum regem Angliae J[ohannem] salutavit nec muneribus honoravit. Cum autem ad propria remeassent nuncio, et quae viderant et audierant domino suo renunciassent, doluit dominus eorum rex J[ohannes] vehementer usque ad spiritus amaritudinem, quod sic ab ipso rege admiralio contempnebatur, et quod in proposito suo impediabatur. Robertus autem de extraneis donis sibi collatis regem liberaliter respexit, ut saltem sic perciperet quod favorabilis aliis audiretur, licet primo repulsus tacuisset. Unde ipse rex ipsum plus aliis honoravit, et quasi pro praemio custodiam abbatis Sancti Albani, quamvis non vacaret, improbus exactor concessit, ut sic de alieno clericum suum fidei transgressor remuneraret. Ipse igitur Robertus, inconsulto, immo potius invite, abate qui pro tempore fuit, videlicet Johanne de Cella, viro religiosissimo, et literatissimo, Omnia quae in ecclesia et curia fuerunt pro libitu dirupit⁷ et sibi appropriavit. Et in qualibet balliva, quas obedientias appellamus, constituit maxime in janua janitorem, omnium diligentem exploratorem et protervum; unde plus quam mille marcas ab eadem domo astute nimis emunxit R[obertus] clericus memoratus. Hic tamen quosdam abbatis ministros praecipuos cum quodam Sancti Albani monacho, videlicet dominum Laurentium senescallum militem, et Laurentium clericum, et magistrum Walterum monachum pictorem dilexit et habuit familiars; quibus gemmas suas et alia secreta revelavit, sibi a dicto admiralio collate, et dicta, audiente Mathaeo qui et haec scripsit, enarravit.

⁷ *dirupit*] dirrupuit, B.

pp. 565–66*Admiralius Marmelinus victus aufugit*

Per idem quoque tempus, ipse⁸ rex sive admiralius Marmelinus, de quo supradictum est, cum infinito quem conflaverat exercitu, non sine, ut dicitur, regis J[ohannis] assensu, fines Hispaniae potenter disposuit occupare; cui magnam audaciam contulerat nutans fides regis J[ohannis] supradicti et regni ejus interdictum. Quod cum cognoverunt reges Hispaniae Christiani, additis quibusdam praelatis, viriliter restiterunt, et victum dissipate exercitu suo a finibus suis fugaverunt, et primogenitum filium suum capto regali vexillo interemerunt.

⁸ *Ipse...Marmelinus*] For this C. has only *admiralius*

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